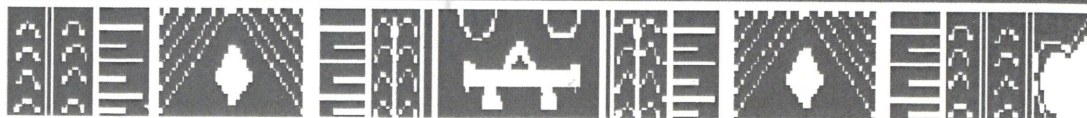




*The*  
*Pacific*  
**JOURNAL**  
*of*  
**THEOLOGY**



ISSN 1027-037X: Series II, No. 58 2020









*The  
Pacific*

JOURNAL

THEOLOGY

ISSN 1027-037X: Series II, No. 58 2020





# **The Pacific Journal of Theology**

Journal of the South Pacific Association  
of Theological Schools (SPATS)

## **Editorial Board**

Tessa Mackenzie (Chair), Anglican Diocese of Polynesia  
Rev. Rusiate Tuidrakulu, General Secretary, SPATS  
Rev. Prof. Dr Upolu Lumā Vaai, Pacific Theological College  
Netani Rika, Pacific Conference of Churches  
Fr. Dr Donal McIlraith, Pacific Regional Seminary  
Kaliti Mate, Weavers Coordinator, SPATS

## **Graphic Design and Typesetting**

Makereta Lasike, SPATS Administrative Assistant  
Trinetra Marketing Pte Limited

## **Cover Design**

Adrienne Morley, Digital Design, Christchurch, New Zealand

## **Copyright ©**

South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, 2020

First Issue, 2020. Except where otherwise stated, the writers of articles alone are responsible for the opinions expressed. No articles in this issue may be reproduced in whole or in part without permission.

## **Published by:**

South Pacific Association of Theological Schools  
P O Box 2426, Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji  
Telephone: (679) 330-3924 or (679) 330-1942  
Email: [info@spats.org.fj](mailto:info@spats.org.fj) OR [admin@spats.org.fj](mailto:admin@spats.org.fj)  
Website: [www.spats.org.fj](http://www.spats.org.fj)

ISSN 1027-037X

## **Subscription Information:**

Apply to South Pacific Association of  
Theological Schools (SPATS)



# CONTENTS

<i>Editorial: The 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College</i> <i>Upolu Lumā Vaai</i>	1
<i>Talanoa of Justice: Keynote Address on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College</i> <i>Archbishop Emeritus Rt Rev. Dr Winston Halapua</i>	6
<i>The Dance of the Frigates: Reframing the Ecumenical History of the Pacific Theological College from the Perspective of the Pacific Household</i> <i>Aisake Casimira</i>	15
<i>Relational Theologising: Why Pacific Islanders Think and Theologise Differently</i> <i>Upolu Lumā Vaai</i>	40
<i>Veikau (Forest/Wild) Theological Pedagogy for Transformative Encounter in Fiji</i> <i>Taniela Balenaikorodawa</i>	57
<i>'Kill the Boys...let the girls live': Murder, Midian, and Mosaic Leadership in Numbers 31</i> <i>Kathryn Imray</i>	76
<i>Si'i le Tuā'oi: Shifting Perceptions on Exodus 1:8-2:10 through a Samoan/Pasefika Reading</i> <i>Faafetai Aiava</i>	97
<i>Resistance, Resilience and Radical Justice: Reimagining Theological Research in the Pacific</i> <i>Gladson Jathanna</i>	116
<i>At Home in the Pacific Five Millennia and Counting: Decolonising Pacific Institutions of Higher Learning and Research Methodologies and the Role of Research Institutions like the Pacific Theological College</i> <i>Unaisi Nabobo-Baba</i>	136
<b>Book Reviews</b>	
<i>In Pursuit of a Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics - A Review of Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women (2003) by Jione Havea</i> <i>Fatilua Fatilua</i>	148
<i>Work in the Spirit Toward a Theology of Work (2001) by Miroslav Volf</i> <i>Ioelu Onesemo</i>	156





The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools acknowledges the 55 years of the Pacific Theological College [PTC] service to the region. Its contribution to the academic development in the region also remains a strong force for international intellectual engagement.

This Issue of the Pacific Journal of Theology commemorates this milestone.

**The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is deeply grateful to:**

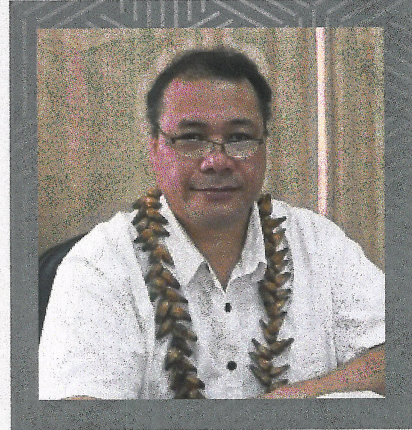
- **Evangelisches Missionswerk (Germany);**
- **Missio (Germany);**
- **The United Methodist Church (USA); and**
- **The Methodist Church (Great Britain)**

**for their grants to the Pacific Journal of Theology and/or the general funds of SPATS that make the publication of this Journal possible.**

## *Editorial*

### **The 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College**

It is my pleasure to introduce this PJT *Issue 58* which is part of the celebration this year to mark the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) since its inception in 1965. Remembering the sacrifices, both documented and undocumented, of our visionary forebears and celebrating the memories of deep solidarity when they united to consolidate in 1965 the building of PTC as the ‘ecumenical academic hull’ of the *Triple-hulled Ecumenical Canoe* of the Pacific churches, the other two being the ‘ecumenical programme hull’ (PCC secretariat) and the ‘ecumenical accreditation hull’ (SPATS secretariat). The three hulls are distinct and therefore function independently yet are mutually and inextricably connected to provide movement and life to the ecumenical canoe. After 55 years, PTC



**Rev. Prof. Dr Upolu Lumā Vaai**

*Principal and Professor  
of Theology & Ethics of  
the Pacific Theological  
College*



has had an outstanding reputation in terms of providing quality ecumenical and theological education to help develop the Pacific region through the mission of the Pacific churches.

Despite the mental wrenching challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, the college on the 13th March launched its anniversary celebration in Suva by journeying backward with thanksgiving with the Suvavou people whose land PTC situates in order to journey forward with redemption and hope. The theme of the anniversary celebration is the theme of its new 2020-25 Strategic Plan, *“Towards Theological Education for Leadership for Justice”*. This is also the theme of this Issue. In the context of life-threatening global trends and their impact on Pacific churches and the regional developments that challenge the vision of the ‘fullness of life’, the church is called into redefining and deepening its call and responsibility for justice. Hence the articles produced in this Issue.

The theme directs and shapes the focus of all the articles to deepen the search for life-affirming theologies that are ground-up and are biblically, theologically, culturally, and practically based. Theologies that aim to empower quality education and leadership that contribute effectively to local and regional stability. That take the side of justice-based praxis and fullness of life. That do not sing in harmony with the conventional empire storyline for the sake of restoring justice for all in God’s Pacific household. And that are able to provide hope and courage for the church to confront head-on the daily colonial and neocolonial intrusions hampering the wellbeing of our Pacific communities.



Deputy Chair of PTC Council Rev Dr Epineri Vakadewavosa  
and Principal cutting the anniversary cake



Archbishop Emeritus Winston Halapua graciously consented to include in this Issue his keynote address on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which provides a radical route-chart to navigate the new ecumenical voyage that the college has just embarked on with the vision, *Theological Education for Leadership for Justice*. He emphasises on the spirit of *togetherness* that is the ecumenical incentive in achieving justice. Accentuating on the need to know the *lotu*, the importance to apprehend the *matanitu* and the spirit to embrace the *vanua*, are the guiding winds for the canoe of justice.

Aisake Casimira challenges the age old myth about the history of PTC that the college is a consequence of the global missionary and ecumenical movements of the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively. He argues that such a celebrated conclusion is the result of Eurocentric historiography that follows a certain scientific method, cultural perspectives and professional dispositions that are vastly different from Pacific worldviews on history. The author argues that the college is not a product of the ecumenical movement nor an unfortunate consequence of multiple and mutually reinforcing global forces but a participant in the liberation of its own history. His arguments are grounded on a historical event of PTC's traditional acknowledgement of the Suvavou people as the original owners of the land on which the college was built and whose ownership was denied by the existing historiographical narratives of the college. The article also offers some radically subversive concepts and historiographical methods by which the history of the college be reimagined in order to do justice to the victims of the past and the present.

Upolu Lumā Vaai exhibits the folly of single-strandic theologising which dominates Pacific education and theological articulation. The author problematises and exposes the *onefication* agenda of the gospel of uniformity promoted by the single-strandic theologising that advocates the one truth way of thinking and made popular by Pacific theological education. Taking the *itulagi* of Pacific relationality as a subversive and contextual hermeneutical tool, the article introduces the *de-onefication* of theology and life that is lived in the Pacific and proposes how such alternative and *different* lives can challenge the colonial single-strandic theologies, hermeneutics and mindsets. The author invites the students of theology and educators in the Pacific to embrace relationality as a constructive and healthy way to navigate multiple complexities and discard the idolatry of *absolute authenticity* promoted by Eurocentric mainstream education.

*Kathryn Imray's* article addresses the characterisation of Moses in Numbers 31, and responds to the problem of how Torah can present such conflictual Moseses, the Moses of 'interfaith' and 'interpartnering', and the Moses of closed borders, the liberator Moses and the genocidal Moses. She offers two responses: first, through source criticism and comparison with contemporaneous texts, and secondly through a narrative reading which traces Moses' leadership from Exodus to the passage in question. This article finds that the biblical redactors frame Moses' actions in Numbers 31 as those of a Pharaoh, and in doing so both condemn the violence committed against the Midianites and caution against leadership predicated upon elevating the importance of one tribal, ethnic, or religious group over others. This re-reading of biblical text traces the intersectional connections to the genocides of modern history, and in the politics of race both near and far away. It addresses the sexual and gendered elements of the story through colonial portrayals of indigenous women, and the use of sexual violence in colonisation.

Through a Samoan/Pasefika re-reading of the Exodus story and in particular, the defiant actions of the female characters within the chosen narrative in Exodus 1:8-2:10, *Faafetai Aiava* in his article treats the issue of justice as an unapologetic desire to live life fully. He argues that the overlapping boundaries of life and death in the text exhibit critical insights pertaining to the manner in which the church today and society at large have normalised mere existence as an acceptable form of life. The challenge that the author poses for the reader is to *sii* (shift) *le tuaoi* (the boundaries) both in our perceptions of what constitutes life and in our theological ruminations about what standing in solidarity with the God of life means.

While offering a distinct and contextual Veikau (Forest/Wild) theological pedagogy for transformative encounter in Fiji, *Taniela Balenaikorodawa* takes the reader to journey with Jesus in the veikau. He argues that the face-to-face encounter of Jesus with the devil in Matthew 4:1-11 calls to mind ways of re-encountering/re-reading this experience through the Fijian *i Taukei* worldview. It is the contention of the article that through the Fijian Bible translation, "veikau", (forest) an important Fijian concept of place and identity, can be useful to expose complex socio-cultural issues and challenge norms in educational pedagogies. The author passionately argues that the veikau, both as a literal or metaphorical space is a critical interpretive tool allowing the 'encounter' to be a transforming concept on the muddy ground.

*Gladson Jathanna*, in his article on reimagining theological research in the Pacific, argues that theological research, especially in a postcolonial context such as the Pacific, has the potentiality either to legitimize and perpetuate the prevailing unjust colonial orders or to contest, resist and dismantle such orders. He addresses the importance of the politics and ethics of research in a postcolonial Pacific context where colonial and neo-colonial empires still seek to extend their control as far as possible. The article believes that theological research is a political and ethical responsibility in which the researcher is ought to take a bold stand resisting the empires that attempt to establish the colonial and euro-centric single-truth, erasing and demonizing the multiple-truths celebrated by the indigenous communities. The author demands a non-conformist resilience in theological research, which, he affirms, is an epistemic and ethical resistance to the empire.

The article by *Unaisi Nabobo-Baba*, the eminent Pacific education scholar in Fiji, focuses on decolonising Pacific institutions of higher learning and research methodologies and the significant role of Pacific research institutions like the PTC. She argues for the need to celebrate Pacific knowledge systems and Pacific decolonised research framework. The author reflectively acknowledges the decolonising work done by PTC in over the decades and argues that such a work has been taken by other institutions rather slowly in the Pacific. She examines the important role that an institution like PTC can play moving into a future that strategically centres the Pacific in its delivery both in its content delivery as well as in its research strategy. The author proposes that such an essential endeavor could be taken via an emergent Pacific School of Thought, first focusing on Oceanic indigenous research and thought and also those in hybridity and evolving.

Overall, the articles including the book reviews that follow invite the readers to a radical new shift in the PTC journey after 55 years through reimagining and reaffirming life-oriented theologies and research practices that advocate for justice. To conclude, I would like to acknowledge with deep appreciation my co-editor in this Issue, Dr Gladson Jathanna, a Senior Lecturer in the PTC history department, whose midwifery wisdom and sharpness assisted in the birthing and safe passage of this quality publication. Also to Ms. Asela Tuisawau, Lecturer in Academic Skills and English, whose sharp proofreading skills contributed to the distinction of this Issue.

Happy 55th Anniversary PTC!





## *Talanoa of Justice*

### **Keynote Address on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College**

**Rt Rev. Dr Winston Halapua**

*Archbishop Emeritus of the  
Anglican Church Diocese  
of Polynesia and former  
student of PTC*

I am honoured to stand before you. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the chair of the Council, Rev. Dr Epineri Vakadewavosa on this important occasion. I acknowledge the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) Rev. James Bhagwan. I am also delighted to share my joy in seeing the leaders of the Fiji Council of Churches present here. I acknowledge the presence of Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba. I would like to say to the Most Reverend Ifere-imi Cama that I'm very honoured to stand here before you. In the history of the Diocese of Polynesia, never before in such an event was a retired Anglican Archbishop graced by the presence of his successor.

Students and members of this community, we only gather here because of you. You are the





reason why we are here in order to look at the past and to look forward to the future. I would like to say you are safe because the *Tui Suva* is here. We are all here in the *Vanua* of the *Tui Suva*. *Tui Suva*, I acknowledge you.

Professor Dr Upolu Vaai, thank you indeed for your kind invitation. It is an honour to stand alongside you as you exercise leadership. When the name of Dr Vaai was announced as the new Principal, I was at the other side of the planet, in Cambridge in the UK. At the time of the significant announcement for the Pacific Theological College (PTC), I decided to make sure that when I returned I would come and *lotu* with him. Eventually, I arrived at PTC. I was invited to the Principal's Office and was welcomed warmly. Principal Upolu informed me that in a meeting that morning my name had come up. The Principal went on to say, "We didn't know where you were. When I came out of the meeting, my Personal Assistant said Winston had made an appointment to see me". The Principal revealed the events planned for this day - the 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College.

Why do I share this? I share this to say that there is Someone bigger than all of us. Someone who is in charge and whose love alone is the reason we are all here.

My presentation is sharing in *talanoa* form. Our ancestors had vision. Without that vision, the ancestors would not have set out and embarked on their voyages across the Ocean which is the deepest, the largest, the richest in resources on Planet Earth. Without vision, the vast ocean would not have been explored by them. The ancestors were not preoccupied with self interest and ownership of the ocean but they were open to its wonder and the mysteries which it held. They pursued a vision which was of something beyond themselves. This vision has enabled a home in the immensity of the ocean for them-

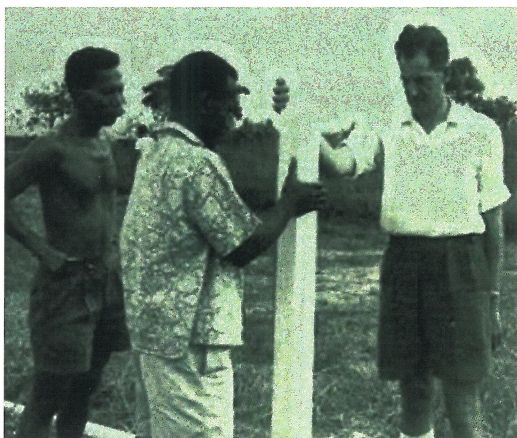


*Clearing of the land belonged to the Suva people for the establishment of PTC in 1965*

selves and the generations to come. After the event tonight, bear in mind that you are descendants of courageous and voyaging ancestors who had vision. Today we can say to the world: this is the home of our ancestors whose vision and courage opened the seemingly impenetrable horizons.

In the nineteen-sixties, in the Pacific region, there was a move towards independence from colonial governments. There was only one nation who had achieved independence and that was Western Samoa. Church leaders in the new and changing context of the Pacific began to dream dreams as to how the Pacific Churches could be relevant in the Mission of God. In time, the Churches dreamt of PTC. So, let us give thanks to God for the insight of our forebears. There was envisaged a promoting of studies to be awarded with a degree – the Bachelor of Divinity. At that time, no theological colleges offered the Bachelor of Divinity degree. In order to provide leadership in the new and changing context, the BD was devised.

I name three Pacific Church leaders who shaped the beginning of the Pacific



*The first post of the PTC building in 1965*

Theological College. Please forgive me if I am selective. But the three key people I choose are: Rev. Setareki Tuilovoni, Rev. Dr Amanaki Havea and Rev. Vavae Toma, respectively from Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa. Key Theological Colleges, apart from French Polynesia, were in these places. Rev. Setareki Tuilovoni, Rev. Dr Amanaki Havea and Rev. Vavae Toma were indigenous leaders. Most previous leaders, as you go through the history, had been

people from outside. There was a need for local leaders who understood the needs of the region and could articulate. The leaders I named enabled the lifting of the level of theological education to the qualification that matched the needs. Other leaders also contributed to the new move.

In the past, there was a togetherness in approach to Pacific needs. Today, there

remains a need for togetherness. When the UN met in Paris in 2015 because of the urgent need to address Climate Change, there was a promotion of working together. In the notion 'togetherness', no one walks alone. The Pacific reminds the world of the importance of working together. We call it ecumenism, we call it regional co-operation and we have other terms. Simply we call it "togetherness".

When I read *50 years' anniversary of the University of South Pacific*, I see the similarities to the journey of PTC because we all belong to this part of the world. Again togetherness is demonstrated. Academics were together in promoting higher training. At PTC, we are together in striving for a way to be relevant in our contexts and to promote higher training. It is a reason for celebration that USP and PTC have become closer together.

Why is PTC important for me and how has PTC contributed to my standing here today? First, I would like you to know we had a scholar as Principal, invited from the United States, the Rev. Dr George Knight. The churches had decided to bring a top scholar in theology so we would know how to make the crucial first steps in the life of PTC.

I share my experience of being in the Principal's Office with the door closed. In our first exams, five students failed. Four of those who failed were Anglicans. When you are in the Pacific, you take pride in yourself and your achievements. When you fail, it is *fakama* (*shame or loss of face*). I felt even more unhappy because my fellow students went on their first academic break. Those of us who failed, stayed back. And I stayed back.

I do not forget the day I was summoned to see Rev. Dr George Knight about my failure. He closed the door. He did not sit still, he gazed at me and he said all what he said. I hard-



*L-R: Fetaui Mataafa, Bishop Vockler, Hon. Faumuina Mataafa  
(Prime Minister of Samoa), Mrs. Burness, Mr. A.T. Low,  
Don Burness, Mrs. Knight, Dr Knight*



ly heard a word. I looked at the window, it was closed, the door wondered what was he going to do or perhaps what I was going to do.

When I eventually graduated from the Pacific Theological College, I was awarded with Dr Knight's prize for Biblical Studies. As leaders, sometimes you need to talk straight to students. The Rev. Dr George Knight was known for his teaching of justice. That was my experience in and out of the class room. An understanding of justice and the importance of the pursuit of justice has been deeply rooted in me since the time of Biblical Studies at PTC.

The Deputy Principal was Rev. Dr John Garrett from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and he taught Pacific history. He made it alive. He made history so alive and in his relationship with students because he was our Rugby coach. I struggled with church history but because my lecturer was a good coach, he stimulated my interest. When John Garrett died, I was honoured when the family asked me to be one of the speakers at his Memorial Service in Suva. It was his request that I speak alongside Rev. Akuila Yabaki and Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere.

A third person who contributed to my formation at the Pacific Theological College was Manasa (I don't remember his surname). Manasa was not a member of faculty. He was the person who took care of the landscaping of these beautiful grounds on the edge of the Ocean. For all the big trees that we have here, including the coconut palms from which students collect coconuts to drink, give thanks to God. Give thanks for Manasa, who enabled the planting. Playing on the rugby field, if you ran fast in the rain, it was like running in the sea. Manasa was the one who levelled the field and made it beautiful so that we could play.

The Chapel is at the centre of the college and a gathering point. If gathering for worship at PTC Chapel is not right, then the rest of life for PTC will never be right. So, worshipping together ecumenically and worshipping with people of other languages was and continues to be an amazingly wonderful opportunity.

Friends, I would like to refer to my classmates – just some of them. I was here with Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere. We were together on the Rugby Field as fast break-aways. Tuwere was on one side and I was on the other side and the last man down was Rev. Dr Jovili Meo. Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere joined me at the School

of Theology in Auckland University. I used his work for students. I realised quickly that his work was appreciated and in demand. The quality of his writing in theology enabled me to see how we would benefit the Pacific and the wider world if he could be invited to teach at the School of Theology and also have time to do research for publication. This would add another dimension to or build on the work of those who pioneered theological education in the region. Today Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere is a Pacific Theologian whose work is published in Fijian, French, German and other languages.

This building is named after Rev. Dr Jovili Meo. He was another classmate. During the leadership of Jovili Meo and I was General Secretary at SPATS, study programmes of Theological Colleges gained accreditation and WEAVERS was established to promote the Theological Education of women.

On the eve of our SPATS meeting in Tonga, I was on my way to the airport. I saw an *itaukei* woman carrying a large bundle of pandanus leaves. Cut green strands, boil them and put it in the sun, yes *voivoi*. When there was a need to name the body to promote Theological Education amongst women, the woman and her bundle for weaving came to my mind. I took the name 'weaver', to Tonga. Hence the WEAVERS today. This is how that name came into being. I address the Tui Suva present among us: WEAVERS is a gift from the *vanua*. Today, the name WEAVERS is known in different parts of the world. It is known for the promotion of Theological Education among women.



*Rev. Dr Halapua with the itaukei weaver*

During the time of Rev. Dr Jovili Meo as Principal and the emergence of SPATS, the Journal of Pacific Theology began to be published. We give thanks for the presence of Dr Tessa Mackenzie. If you need to know about that valuable resource, Tessa Mackenzie will help you. The shelves of many Theological Education Institutions have copies of this Journal. The writings of Pacific scholars have spread widely.

A third classmate I mention today was the Rev. Oka Fauolo, a Christian with strong discipline. He was an example. He was kind and made sure people like me behaved well. When I became Archbishop, I went to see Oka Fauolo to ask him to give me a blessing. I asked him to bless me because when we talked about Theological Education, theology and the reality of the field, Oka was one of those who lived out what we were engaged with. He practised theology in a special way. He was a scholar and a Pastor. Oka had integrity from his student days and throughout his ministry.

In my time at the Pacific Theological College, we had the Chapel so that we knew the priority of the worship of the Church, we had the Library to enable quality education and we had the Rugby Field in order to play and exercise our bodies. (We watched the *kuka* in the *dogo*, before we played – that is a way we learnt to love the environment!)

The Pacific Theological College's development included ecumenical ventures. I came here in the second generation of students because the Anglican Theological College, St John's College, closed as one of the ventures towards ecumenism. PTC was kind to the Anglican Church.

How has theological education at PTC contributed to my leadership? My reply is: in many ways. Significantly, my formation in the study of the Scriptures was



*Construction of PTC Admin building and classrooms 1966*

here. Biblical studies became a life-long passion and have shaped my thinking, contributing in many ways to my ongoing ministry. Little did I know that a Principal of PTC would speak strongly to me about failing the Biblical Studies examination. However, I was spoken to justly. I am a child of that justice and I give thanks. Dr John Garrett, the distinguished historian, enabled me to become clearer about my identity as a Pacific Islander. Today as I



live and breathe, my mission includes the promotion of justice and an understanding of identity. If we do not know who we are then what do we offer? I give thanks for Rev. Dr George Knight and to Rev. Dr John Garrett for their contributions to my formation in ministry at PTC and for enabling me to clarify where I stand today.

I have been told that the Council of the Pacific Theological College meeting last year approved the vision and strategy of the Principal with “justice” as a particular focus of the direction of the College. I am encouraged. My own work has been to forward the pursuit of justice in the issues we are facing as a region, also globally.

I was able to give a contribution to the Pacific Theological College when Dr Havea was Principal here. I was given the honour to be the chair of the Executive when we appointed the Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere to be lecturer and later took over as Principal from Dr Amanaki.

For fourteen years I served as a member of faculty at Auckland University. It was there I worked alongside Rev. Dr Sevati Tuwere. The first generation of students from the Pacific at the School of Theology in Auckland University were mostly from the Pacific Theological College. SPATS worked effectively because the people I talked with so often were ex-students of Pacific Theological College. In recent years, I have been working at a global level. I could only take this path because of the togetherness I learnt here at the Pacific Theological College.

Without the togetherness in Christ, we cannot move. Without togetherness, we will not be able to strengthen the identity of the Pacific region and contribute to the wider wellbeing of Planet Earth: its diverse environments, creatures and its many peoples. I would like you to know that 1.5 degrees Celsius achieved at Paris was a major contribution of the *lotu* and the togetherness of Pacific people.

I conclude with a theme of Dr Tuwere: we need to know the *lotu*, we need to know the *matanitu*, we need to know the *vanua*. Without one of them, we will fail to act justly. Justice needs to be central to our lives. Why? It is because the whole Creation belongs to God our Creator. When God comes in Jesus Christ, what God leaves for us is not a financial investment. The Lord Jesus Christ leaves behind a living, loving community and breathes His Spirit into it. This is a com-

munity in which the Risen Christ within the lives of God's people is evident.

May I myself repeat again: it is an honour to stand here, in front of the members of faculty and students and all of you. Where to from here? The answer is already here. If we celebrate the 'now', and know where the 'now' is and where the 'now' is from, the future is already in place.

I conclude by a prayer which comes from the Anglican Lectionary. I find it very meaningful and hope it may help you:

*Holy Spirit of God, you blow where you will, blow once more, through us your chosen people, enlighten us with your power, move us with your strength, that we may be born of the Spirit into eternal life, with the Father, the Son, you live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Vinaka vakalevu.

---

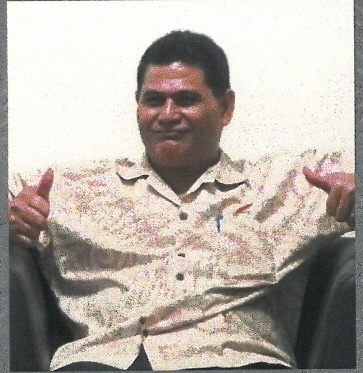
## *The Dance of the Frigates*

**Reframing the Ecumenical History  
of the Pacific Theological College from the  
Perspective of the Pacific Household**

### INTRODUCTION

The first part of the title of this article ‘the dance of the frigates’ is used in a metaphorical sense to denote the dance of two frigates: the ‘frigate’ as a warship used in war but used here as the symbolic subjugation of cultural and historical memory, and frigate the bird that writes its own history path in its raceful movements, glides and resourcefulness. The history of the college is nuanced in this dance nexus – between the narratives of a multiple and mutually reinforcing global trajectories, and the narrative of one who for fifty-five years has not taken flight to determine its course.

This year is the Pacific Theological College’s



**Mr Aisake Casimira**

*From his ancestral  
home in Hau, No'atau,  
Rotuma, Aisake*

*Casimira is director of  
the Institute for Mission  
and Research, based at  
the Pacific Theological  
College.*



(hereafter, college) 55<sup>th</sup> year of existence, since its establishment in 1965. To mark the year, the college launched its yearlong plan of activities in March. Significant in the launch programme was the college's traditional acknowledgment of the Suvavou people, as the traditional owners of the land on which it was built. In his presentation, the Principal stated that “[b]efore PTC came into being in 1965, Suva people lived on this land, you are the original owners of this great land... It is unfortunate that the recent history of the PTC that has gone into textbooks and accepted in mainstream education does not mention the owners of the land. Even the Government's lease documents do not, we want to correct that tonight” (Va'ai 2020, 6 March). Quite apart from its novelty because it has never been done before, the traditional gesture by the college is decisively significant in two respects: (a) it was, in fact, a deliberate and incisive liberating moment for the college, that the journey from now on will be about the liberation of itself and its history, and the reframing of its literary tradition; and, (b) it situated the college in the resistance tradition of the Pacific island people to colonialism, from the colonial to the post-independence times; in civilian coups, the self-determination and anti-nuclear protest movements, civil and labour unrests in some island countries, and in academic writings and the arts.

There is a widespread conviction that the college is a consequence of the global missionary and ecumenical movements of the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively. Much of the written history of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific certainly draws this conclusion, and everything else in between are footnotes. However, what is doubtful is whether or not such a conclusion can be sustained. This is in view of the fact that much of it was written from a Eurocentric tradition that follows a certain scientific method, and from cultural perspectives and professional dispositions that are vastly different from Pacific worldviews on history. The fifty-fifth anniversary of the college and its trajectory to be self-determining as envisioned in its traditional acknowledgment of the Suvavou people and its strategic plan 2020-2025, and the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM) resolution 4 in 2017, to re-conceptualize ecumenism in the Pacific as the ‘Household of God in the Pacific’ (2017, 1), provide the impetus for this article.

This article is written from a socio-political perspective. The author does not lay claim to any training or study as a professional historian or in the subject matter. The aim is to contribute to the reframing agency of the college and its literary tradition, and to the ecumenical history of the Pacific. It specifically

proposes to do three things: (a) present an overview of the ‘normal’ history of the college as recorded and the gaps in it; (b) argue that the college is not a product of the ecumenical movement nor an unfortunate consequence of multiple and mutually reinforcing global forces but a participant in the liberation of its own history; and, (c) offer some concepts and history methods that the college can utilise to map its own emancipation course, to resist and liberate itself.

### **The diffidence of the frigate – the popularised history of the college**

Most written records of the college, more or less, are basically chronological, sequential and future projected. But such historical sequencing is faulty and presumptuous, with a clear framing purpose. The widely accepted view that the college is a child of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) is prime example of such a historical sequencing. The truth, however, is that the college and the PCC (the secretariat is not to be equated with PCC), established in 1965 and 1966 respectively, were the visions of the Pacific Church Leaders. Nevertheless, the crux of such a faulty and presumptuous historical sequencing is the nesting of the college’s history in the global missionary and ecumenical histories. The sequence reads as follows: in 1959, the International Missionary Council (IMC) started to organise and plan a regional conference to establish a regional ecumenical movement; the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific was then held at the Malua Theological College in Samoa in April, 1961; it was also traced back to the South Pacific Missionary Conference that was held in Morpeth in 1948 in Australia (Tuilovoni 1962); and a month later, following the Malua Conference, the Dudley House consultation was held to discuss the details to establish the college. After two further meetings in 1962 and 1964 on the same purpose, the college was officially opened and the first students were enrolled to begin their studies in 1965 (Forman 2005, 115; Garrett 1992, 247; Ernst 1994; Nokise 2015). The vision was that “... the leaders envisaged that in all of this sharing and interaction, the churches will realize not only their oneness in Christ, but that they also have a responsibility to make available to the world those distinctive theological insights which God has given to the people of the Pacific region” (Nokise 2015, 12; see also Forman 2005, 115). Over the years the vision was amended but the gist of training church pastors and ministers with unique insights in mission and theology remains.

John Garrett in his three volumes (1982, 1992, 1997), traced the histories of Pacific churches from the missionary days to the post World War II period,

which included the political independence of island states and churches, and the establishment of regional and national ecumenical bodies. Each of the volumes highlights and profiles key missionary personnel, both of European descent and Pacific islanders, and the influential role they played in the establishment and growth of their churches in their respective islands, and their missionary endeavours in other islands. In this regard, and insofar as the mainline churches - the various Protestant traditions, the Anglican and Catholic - are concerned, their histories are well documented in Garrett's three volumes. However, the political independence of the island states and the growth of international trade and mobility, gave rise to the growth of new and emerging forms of Christianity in the islands. In 1994, Manfred Ernst published a comprehensive and detailed study of the rise of the new religious movements, and their political and social influence in the Pacific islands, and later in 2006, he contributed, edited and produced a volume on the impact of globalisation on Christianity in the Pacific. Eleven years later, he also contributed and co-edited the follow-up volume to his 1994 study. These are valuable historical records for the churches, theological schools and students of church history.

In theological education, Charles Forman wrote extensively on the history of theological schools in the region. His two volumes (1982, 1986) and various journal articles were almost exclusively dedicated to the histories of the Pacific churches, their mission work and the theological education and training of their pastors and ministers. At least two of his journal articles - *Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians* (2005) and *Theological education in the South Pacific Islands: a quiet revolution* (1969) - in detail, were about theological education in the Pacific region and the churches' responses to the political changes with the advent of political independence and social changes as the islands came more into contact with the cash economy, commercial centres and development of industries, and new forms of education. He highlighted the valuable contributions of the college trained theological students and theologians in their own right, to what he calls the 'reinterpretation of Christianity' in the Pacific, and briefly profiled four of the region's prominent theologians, namely, Tuwere, Havea, Boseto and Finau (2005). Since its establishment in 1965, the college has not only contributed much to the formation of church leaders and their theological education, but also contributed immensely of their unique theological insights to the worldwide body of theological and biblical knowledge. As he said, 95 percent of the 295 theses written prior to 1994, were on Pacific topics (2005, 115).



In a nutshell, however, the above gives a truly linear, scientific, and historical deterministic account of the college, and if that is all there is to the history of the college, then there is nothing further to add, only to celebrate. Carr (1963, 7 December) says as much, “[o]f course, if History were nothing but a succession of extraneous ‘accidents’, it could not be a serious study at all.” But history is less about absolutes and certainties, than it is about the hermeneutics of the historical data. It is more about the methods of interpretation, one’s history tradition and professional disposition than it is about establishing the objective truth, based on available data. What has been briefly presented above is not to say that the available data didn’t predict the outcome of the college as such. Rather, the historians who researched and recorded the history of the college, based their reading and interpretation of the available data before them on their perspectives as historians. But in doing so, presented an outcome that casts the college as a historical result of a worldwide undertaking for world peace and unity, of which the ecumenical movement was a part.

The outcome can be seen in two distinct yet interrelated ways. One, the history of the college is nothing more or less than a celebrated appendage to the missionary endeavours that began in the eighteenth century and the ecumenical movement in the early twentieth century. And, two, the history of the college is largely shaped by the global missionary and ecumenical narratives of the missionary sending churches. The gatherings in Malua and in Dudley in 1961, and later in 1962 and 1964, were dominated by the global narratives of the ecumenical movement and missionary sending churches from Europe (Nokise 2015, 9-13). Either of the two perspectives, however, portrays a reading of a college history that, like the frigate the bird whose wings are clipped, cannot be anything less or more than a footnote, trapped in a church historian’s reference margins. Is it possible that the college could have been established without the ‘impetus’ and ‘inspiration’ of the global missionary and ecumenical movements? In the light of the fact that before the missionaries set foot in the region, Pacific people have been traversing the Ocean for trade, exchange and war, is it possible then that the church leaders at the time, like their ancestors, could have traversed the doctrinal divide and would have established PCC and the college, regardless? If this was so, would the story of the ecumenical movement and the content of theological education be different today?

One of the glaring assumptions in the written history of the college is that the establishment of the college is an ‘inevitability’, as the above paragraph indi-

cates. If it is so, then the dispossession of indigenous people of their lands, the appropriation and devaluing of their knowledge systems, and their subjugation to poverty are also inevitable. The point is that the causation principle alone is not enough to read and interpret the history of the college. What is also needed, among other principles, is the recognition, in Berlin's (1997, 189) words, that "[h]uman beings were unique in their capacity for moral choice, which rendered them relatively independent of the impersonal forces determining human behaviour". Although it can be conceded that the global movements – missionary and ecumenical – did have an impact on the eventual formation of the college, moral choice of a people or persons must be part of a historian's responsibility in the present. In that regard, the questions are, why wasn't a thorough research done on the written notes and conversations of Pacific church leaders who were influential at the time, such as Tuilovoni, Havea and Toma, and what were the moral choices and professional dispositions of the historians who researched and wrote about the history of the college, and the Pacific ecumenical movement?

The history of the college, as argued by the historians who researched and wrote about it, primarily took the 'inevitability' argument and restricted their scope of evidence to the religious data, i.e., the missionary and ecumenical written accounts and records. The colonial and post-colonial data of the worldwide project for a civilisation of peace and unity were either cited as a contextual background to a study or, if one is lucky, a paragraph in an essay on Pacific history. It would seem, therefore, that the written history of the college was designed to realise a purpose – to assist the churches decide the relevant policy options on theological education and, generally, on regional ecumenism. But as Evans (2001, xxv) argues, "[h]istory is very poor predictor of future developments and future events... All that historians can do is to generalize and attempt to find patterns that make a reasonable fit with the historical evidence; but they cannot use these generalizations and patterns to predict the future, because there will always be exceptions to them."

What is important in researching and writing the history of the college, therefore, is the critical consideration of the wider contexts and causes, which was substantively missing in the written history of the college. As noted in the above paragraph, the written records of the college were, by and large, restricted to the interpretation of the missionary and the ecumenical narratives. Less considered was the wider contexts and causes, which are the colonial and post-colonial narratives.

## The reticence of the frigate – the hidden history of the college

Any attempt to reframe the history of the college, by necessity, involves situating it in the broader colonial and post-colonial context of the Pacific islands. However, because much has been written on the colonial experiences of the Pacific island people, their resistance, and their journey to political independence, and because of the limited space allowed for this article, a cursory look at the global project to create a ‘civilisation of peace and unity’ is presented below.

In a high court ruling in 2010, the presiding judge rejected the claims of the Suvavou people, filed in 1999, and upheld the argument of the state, the defendant in this case. The claim before the high court was that the Suvavou people’s ownership of the Suva peninsula had not been relinquished, either by the colonial administration or by the declaration of independence act, and that no compensation was paid by the colonial government, except for a £200 per year for life for the 300 acres where the government house is presently situated (Chambers 2008, 111). At the time of the high court trial, the estimated land value of the central business district of Suva, which included the land on which the college is built, was \$693 million (Chambers 2008, 111). The point of contention was the *judiciary duty* of the state, which simply means that the state, cannot be held liable for a transaction that was done prior to the declaration of independence (Chambers 2008, 115). The independence act nullified such claims (and in effect, such claims in other island states).

The history of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific, it would seem, was written from a triumphalist disposition, and from a ‘determinist’ perspective - the research and presentation of the historical data was in reference to a positive outcome. Hence, the fraudulent dispossession of the Suvavou people of their land was justified because the outcomes of such an action was the establishment of the college in Suva, which to this day, is serving the mission and theological needs of the Pacific churches and their people. And Suva, as the political and commercial center of Fiji, having reaped billions of dollars in return. It follows that if the ecumenical movement was not introduced into the Pacific, as part of the ‘world peace and unity’ movement, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and the college would not have been established, or the billion dollar returns in making Suva the capital of Fiji. For the most part, the written records of Pacific histories took this line of argument, the causation principle. Contrastingly, this is countered by a history that reveals increasing poverty, deepening



inequality, and the appropriation and devaluing of Pacific people's indigenous knowledge. A stark contrast if we consider that certain models of education and development were touted to bring about 'world peace and unity', and prosperity.

The colonial expansion was fuelled largely by the triumphal march of the industrial revolution from the eighteenth century, with the idea that science will unshackle humanity from its bondage to the Christian God. Generally, however, and which is acknowledged in most post-colonial critique, that the global movement to create a 'civilisation of peace and unity', was a mutually inclusive and reinforcing composite of three trajectories: political subjugation of territories, islands and peoples; resource extraction, reframing of development, and re-education; and religious implantation, the spread of Christianity through the missionaries, and their sending churches. As Fry (2019, 44) tactfully frames it, "[t]he contest within the European imagination about how '*the Pacific society*' should be characterised and changed occurred in three key intersecting arenas: the world of official policymaking, the world of the representatives of religion and commerce and the world of the creators of knowledge—the *philosophes* and the natural and social scientists. As we have seen, the official 'framing of the islands' began as an idea associated with exploration, cartography and science and, later, with imperialism." This framing "... created the context in which the establishment of imperial control of these societies was thought possible, and indeed became part of the imposition and management of empire" (Fry 2019, 44). By the time the neoliberal project started in 1947, the context of the non-European world, including the Pacific, was already framed.

This neoliberal project was an idea of forty philosophers, historians, and economists (later to be known as the Mont Pèlerin society). They met at Mont Pèlerin, a village in Switzerland, in 1947, two years after the end of WWII. Among them were the philosopher Friedrich von Hayek and the economist and intellectual Milton Friedman, two of the more well-known individuals. The purpose was to reconstruct a new world order, after the destruction of the old one by the two world wars and the Spanish flu in between the two wars, and to articulate a new economic philosophy to drive it. The latter came to be known as 'neoliberal economics'. Social engineering was the process used to 'reconstruct this new world order', which Lynch Jr. and Jackisch (2002, 126) describe as "[t]he goal of entirely reconstructing society, without considering that these experiments necessarily have both unwanted and unforeseeable consequences...

in order to 'straighten' society towards the desired direction." Hayek (1988, 17) provided its fundamental premise: "[a]lthough cultural evolution... brought differentiation, individualisation, increasing wealth, and great expansion to mankind, its gradual advent has been far from smooth. We have not shed our heritage... nor have these instincts either 'adjusted' fully to our relatively new extended order." The implications on the diversities of cultures and faith traditions were frightening, as Lynch Jr. (1994, 6) explains:

[T]he expression 'culture' derives from 'to be cultivated.' The fertility of human efforts towards being cultivated, that is, to reduce his ignorance, is in direct proportion to the possibility of contrasting his knowledge with others. It is only possible to incorporate fragments of fertile earth, in the sea of ignorance in which we debate, as far as there is room for open discussion... Culture does not belong to a certain latitude or other, it is the result of innumerable individual contributions within a context of an unending evolutionary process. The allusion to 'national culture' is just as off-key as referring to Asian mathematics or Dutch physics.

The rapid expansion of the neoliberal global project, however, rests entirely on this simple, yet captivating and highly appealing Platonic principle: *truth, reality which is the essences of things, is universal. What is true for one is therefore true for everyone at all times, and the more universal a culture is the closer to truth it becomes* (Sacks 2002, 49). In fact, says Shasha (2003, 6), "Platonic philosophy has been the metaphysical and theoretical underpinning of Western culture for thousands of years." Everything else are appendages to this principle. For over 200 years, since the first traders and missionaries arrived in the Pacific, with slight contextual variances, it shaped missionary and church mission theologies and evangelism activities in colonial and post-colonial times, the development of towns and cities, economic theories and policies, social theories, and political systems and institutions. A large part of this expansion was about resource exploitation, appropriation of knowledge systems, spirituality and legal systems, and the usurpation of identity.

While these cannot be said to be part of a well-planned and coordinated eighteenth century colonial enterprise, these were certainly core to the socially engineered new world order conceived by the Mont Pèlerin society in 1947. In order to 'internationalize' the new world order, Hayek proposed four key pil-

lars, premised on libertarian ideals: (a) neoliberal economics that would free the individual to pursue his or her own self-interests; (b) limited governments with less control and interference in the market; (c) a reformed legal system, especially on property rights, that would serve ‘liberalism’ and rights, and to rein in the interference of governments in the market economy; and, (d) a new form of religion that would liberalize and privatize faith from the rigid confines of institutionalized religion (Monbiot 2007, 28 August; Ravier 2009, 7; Iber 2018, 23 April; Fry 2019, 217-218). For the Pacific region, according to Fry (2019, 218), “the most important expression of this new framing was the attempt by Australia and New Zealand to promote an institutionalised regional economic order based on neoliberal principles”. Militarization and education are to be the implementing strategies. What could not be achieved by education is to be attained by force. In most cases, however, both strategies were employed, to subdue and pacify.

In relation to the religious component of the neoliberal global project, the rise of the new religious movements since the 1940s, was phenomenal. For the Pacific region, Manfred Ernst’s 1994 study, the 2006 edited, and the 2017 co-edited volumes continue to be highly relevant, especially in relation to the links between neoliberalism and the new religious movements. In less than 50 years, the neoliberal project achieved what the missionaries did in over 200 years: privatize faith and orient it to serve the economy so that it becomes ‘one of the products for sale’ in the world market. In perspective, however, the neoliberal project only intensified the globalisation process that started in the fifteenth century with the accumulation of capital by the merchants (Ernst 2005, 29). And by the time of the traders and missionaries’ excursions into the Pacific in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the liberal idea of ‘privatized faith’ was a major part of the conversion theology. For example, ‘believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved’ or ‘believe in Jesus Christ, and you will be like us, rich’ or as Nokise (2015, 9) observes, “if one wants to have the wealth that missionaries had, then one had to know and learn things that belonged to the world of the missionaries.” The religious drive of the neoliberal global project merely packaged, personalized and, with a price tag of freedom from institutional rigidity, placed it on the supermarket shelves for sale.

But, the colonial period prior to and after WWII in the Pacific was also marked by resistance and movements for self-determination where the people were waking up to global events happening around them, by claiming back their land



and rightful place. Garrett (1997) explains that in Samoa for example, the *Mau* movement which started around 1900 was a reaction to the suppressive colonial rule, disregard for the *faa* Samoa (the Samoan way of life) and the inability of the New Zealand colonial government to curb the influenza epidemic. The local movement was supported by some missionaries and led to Samoa's political independence in 1962 – the first in the Pacific. Similarly, in the Solomon Islands, the *Ma'asina* Rule was a resistance movement against what locals, mainly from the island of Malaita, perceived as suppression and disregard for *kastom* (a Solomon Islands pigin word for custom or culture) by the British colonial administration. Also, resistance against the colonial government intensified in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) due to the French government's nuclear tests (1966-1995), causing a huge outcry by the people and the Protestant churches. Nicole (2006) traced the resistance movements in Fiji which included the resistance of the Suvavou chief and his people of the colonial administration's suppression.

When the Pacific islands moved towards independence, a new strain of independent thinking emerged amongst Pacific peoples. Decolonizing attitudes were brought about by identity formation and challenging ideals through a wider cultural conscience and increasing economic regionalism. With the establishment of the college in 1965, Pacific theologians have been more exposed to indigenous and contextual theologies with the growing realisation that theology "is the human response in faith to the living God that can never be contained in any one tradition of human responses" (Talapusi 1994, 1). This awakening process which is happening within the churches, is also related to ongoing calls for a distinction and appreciation of and between Western and Pacific epistemologies and perspectives in research and praxis. The concern then, as it is today, is that the globalisation of cultures and economies threatens traditional social systems, structures and ethics which act as the key source for developing Pacific hermeneutical approaches to ecumenism.

### **The frigate on the edge – An interpretive framework**

This article is written in the shadows of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nothing will ever be the same after this, if ever, some say. From socio-economic, political and psychological impacts to religious and moral re-evaluations, the pandemic has brought the human community to the edge of deep questioning on the one hand, and creativity on the other. The edge is the space where humanity stands between order and disorder, and the given and the new. It is the space in which

humanity has two choices: (a) to return to what is certain and familiar or (b) take its chances in the uncertainties of a future that is still to be shaped. But at the same time, it is a space where fresh and innovative ideas emerge, and fundamental change can happen, as Fithian (2020, 20 April) explains in an interview with the Truthout magazine, “[t]he edge is that dynamic space; it’s that place of dynamism where all things are possible, and where the deepest changes can occur”.

In his address as Moderator to the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) in 2018, Havea (2018, 3), passionately reasoned with the churches that,

... it is impossible to move forward with our new ecumenical story without its spiritual, cultural and self-determination foundations. Without this we will not be able to withstand internal and external challenges, nor we will succeed in our discernment for adequate responses to regional and local challenges. We must script the new story of our ecumenical journey together; it cannot be otherwise. This is our task, not someone else’s. Today, our mission stories ought to focus on dismantling today’s dominant single story of the ‘good life’ which says that our sole purpose in life is economic productivity and consumption”.

A year earlier in April, the full body of the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM) met in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand to discuss and discern a new direction for the ecumenical movement in the Pacific. The outcomes of the work that started in 2013, after the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of PCC on renewal, was the basis for the PCLM’s discernment. It made a highly significant resolution: *that no longer would ecumenism in the Pacific is to mean ‘Unity of the Body of Christ’ but the ‘Household of God in the Pacific’* (2017, 3). This is a telling and significant departure from the WCC, especially by the European and the North American churches’ definition, based on their biblical and theological reading of John 17:21. The PCLM (2017, 2-3) then adopted the idea of a ‘Pacific Ecumenical Council’ and tasked the ten founding members of PCC to develop the structural and theological basis for the ‘household’ conceptualization of ecumenism.

In Havea’s (2018, 3) plea to the PCC General Assembly, there are three

significant aspects insofar as the discipline of history is concerned. The first is the 'new ecumenical story'. It implies that the written history of ecumenism is no longer adequate, and does not capture the dynamics and intricacies of Pacific people's history worldviews in its interpretation of the historical data. The second are fundamentals for the new ecumenical story: 'spiritual, cultural and self-determination'. The inclusion of not just the spiritual but also culture and self-determination as foundational, brings out three key elements in history research, writing and discourse: (a) the need for wider contexts and causes in history research; (b) history must also read the data from a cultural worldview; and, (c) history must have a vision upon which the written record aims to contribute. The latter point is contentious, especially in the Eurocentric formulations of history research protocols. Nevertheless, all three, especially the first two, highlight the point that was stated earlier in regards to the limitations of the written records of the college: the lack of a wider context and the non-consideration of Pacific worldviews. The third is that the writing of the new story is 'our task, not someone else's... [and] to focus on dismantling today's dominant single story'. Researching and writing Pacific histories must be the task of a Pacific person, whether that person is a professional historian or not, and it must have a purpose. Carr (1960, 117) and Maude (1971, 24) would certainly agree with Havea on the last point of his third posit but would find heavy criticisms from some professional historians, for example, Legge (1960, 117) and Berlin (1961, 15 June).

If one is to research and write the history of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific, say twenty years from today, one would note this significant departure from the traditionally accepted definition of ecumenism. The guiding questions would then be: why and how was it conceived, and what is the interpretative framework used in the analysis and writing of this historical aspect? For the most part, prior to and in the early years of the political independence of most Pacific island states, as discussed above, the content framing of Pacific histories was constructed by mostly Europeans. These were already trained in a specific history method, were doing research and writing, and had the financial means to do so. Most of the written accounts of the college, attempted to stay as close-to-the-truth interpretation of the historical facts, albeit the ecumenical and missionary data, as possible, although the triumphalism of the eighteenth century which underpinned colonialism and the libertarian orientation of the neoliberal project remained the interpretative framework. But, as Lal (2007, 196) argues, "[i]slands consist of people, men and women, elites and commoners, of privileged and underprivileged regions, of sahibs and subalterns, who speak

with different voices and have different interests and understandings. To attribute homogeneity and uniformity of motive, interest and behaviour to such a disparate group is problematic”.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has been deeply tragic in its impacts, and with due respect to those tragically affected, it presents opportunities. Pacific people are retelling their own family and community stories about connections while on lock-down, reminiscing about their indigenous knowledge on basic life skills, reviving ancient trade practices such as the barter system (Tora 2020, 8 May), and recalling the wisdom of their ancestors. All of which comprise what is generally regarded in the Pacific, as a composite body of historical knowledge and experiences that is called ‘living history’ (Reynaud 2006, 6). Nothing in a Pacific person’s view of history is dead; just as ecology is understood as the interconnectedness of the living and non-living in a household and is a living relationship (Va’ai 2019). History is a living aspect of a Pacific person’s cosmological worldview. Sadly, ‘living history’ is not regarded as a legitimate science because its methods and processes are creatively chaotic, not logically comprehensible, and outside the prescribed scientific methods and principles of enquiry and validation. Pacific historians should not be pinioned by these scientific theories but should reflect their people’s perception of history, and experiences, which are, in no way, less scientific or inferior to scientific theories. Relevance of their histories to themselves should be the pursuit of a Pacific historian. As Denoon (1996, 212) writes, “[r]heoretical rigour alone does not make great teachers and writers. It certainly helps, but has no value without three qualities, which are hard to teach but vital to cultivate: imagination in asking questions, passion in researching them, and poetry in expression”.

If the history is a mere chronological sequencing of events, incidents and significant movements, then there is little that can be learnt from it. Fortunately, history, generally seen in most Pacific cultures, is a body of memories that records less about time and the sequencing of events, and more about the memories associated with and which give meaning to an event (Renaud, 2006: 6). Death is always a loss to humanity, period. But for most, the death of a person anywhere in the world, is not an occasion to mourn, not because they don’t care, but because they have no memories associated with the deceased, which will give meaning to their sense of loss. It is not the meticulous recording of an event’s chronology and sequencing, but more so the memories and stories associated with the event, the hermeneutics of the memories, and the moral choices,



that matter most in the cosmological view of a Pacific islander's conception of history (Renaud 2006, 6).

There are recently developed research and writings on social memory and cultural memory studies that could be relevant to students of Pacific church or secular history, among them are the 'collective memory studies' by Halbwachs (1994, 1997, 2008). These were later translated into a sociological framework as 'social memory studies' by Olick and Robins (1998). However, with the growing influence of culture on memory studies, especially stories, rituals, art and architecture in the 1980s, the German historians, Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, pioneered a model for history conceptualization, research and writing on memory studies, centred on the concept of *cultural memory* (Tamm 2013, 461). Jan Assmann (1995, 132) defined *cultural memory* as comprising "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose civilisation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image." History, in this perspective, is a person or a group of people's collective memory of their stories manifested through their rituals, and their art forms and written records. Rigney (2012, 366) expanded its conceptualization to read "a working memory which is continuously performed by individuals and groups as they recollect the past selectively through various media and become involved in various forms of memory activity, from narrating and reading to attending commemorative ceremonies or going on pilgrimages." These forms of memory studies, defined as social constructs, for obvious reasons, present serious challenges to history, defined as an objective science, and to professional historians. These are vastly two different categories of knowledge – memory and scientific data.

The issue in relation to the college is not that these are relevant knowledge domains to a holistic understanding of its history. Rather, it is how to avoid historical relativism and positivism if one is to focus primarily on memory studies on the one hand, and on the other, historical imperialism, as argued above where the written history of the college seemed to cast the college as a celebrated appendage to a global complex movement of mutually reinforcing trajectories. Neither, however, should be the determinant in a reframing method of researching and writing the history of the college or the histories of our islands. Nor should they be seen as irrelevant, and as pointed out above, both are relevant knowledge domains. As Lal (2007, 196) notes, "[t]he human mind or the creative spirit should not be shackled by arid theory, which should reflect rath-

er than determine experience. Historians should learn and, where appropriate, borrow from cognate disciplines". Further on he says, "[i]n the fundamental analysis, the past is a foreign country to all of us; the only keys to that past are understanding, patience, knowledge, language skills and cultural sensitivity, not necessarily ethnicity or gender or class." (Lal 2007, 198).

Considering what seems to be a stalemate between history as science and memory studies as social constructs, it is important, therefore, to consider another approach to the study of history: *mnemohistory*. It is an approach that broadens the historians' scope of enquiry from a "study of the events of the past to that of their later impacts and meaning" (Tamm 2013, 464). Assmann (1997, 9) explains this approach of which he coined the term, as "... concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past. *Mnemohistory* is interested not so much in the factuality as in the actuality of the past – not in the past for its own sake but in its later impact and reception... The past is not simply 'received' by the present. The present is 'haunted' by the past and the past is modelled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present." Aside from its significance and relevancy to how Pacific islanders, in general, understand, record, and tell stories about their history, this historiography approach makes a valid claim, as Dilthey (cited in Tamm 1992, 278) states: "[w]e are historical beings first, before we are observers of history, and only because we are the former do we become the latter."

As briefly argued above, the written history of the college was researched, written and presented as part of and a celebrated appendage to the histories of the missionary and ecumenical activities of primarily European and English churches, and as a product of an 'inevitability' perspective, so much so that Garrett (1997, 265) noted that PCC "was foreseen". And while it profiled and highlighted key individuals and churches, and their stories, identified trends and patterns, and proposed meanings, it didn't account for the agency of a Pacific person's capacity for moral choice, or for that matter, their community's capacity for it and their collective memories in their stories of affirmation and resistance, and in the art forms and rituals. The tragedy of this limitation is that it casts the college as a product of circumstances and forces beyond its control. History is written by the victor, is a popular aphorism, and it would seem that the history of the college and that of the Pacific ecumenical movement, is written

with a sense of triumphalism and a Platonic attitude.

In reality, however, neither the establishment of the college or the Pacific ecumenical movement, nor the global ecumenical or the missionary movements, should be considered historical successes or liberating. If anything, the college has moved very little from the prescribed curriculum since its establishment in 1965. Its method of teaching history and teaching in general, has not changed much, students' theses of which Forman (2005, 115) wrote about as containing Pacific themes have not been able to influence change in their churches in the last fifty-five years, and theologies of Pacific theologians cited and profiled by Forman (2005, 116-118) have not found their way into the list of churches' theological schools' core reference resources, churches' policy on mission and theological curriculum, and popular discourse. Change is not necessarily the same as progress. While the written historical records seem to trumpet change, progress has not, unfortunately.

## Conclusion

The history of the college is profoundly unique, if one is to stand on this fifty-fifth year of the college's existence and scan the past fifty-five years, and from it glimpse a reframed story that it can begin to write with a different perspective. In the assertions and claims that the college is a 'product' of the missionary and ecumenical movements or an 'unfortunate' consequence of the neoliberal global project, and their timelines, as discussed, one can either resign to the fact that history will write itself by whoever has the means, or inspire self-belief that the last fifty-five years was, in fact, a liberating journey. Not in acquiesce to the global forces discussed, but one of realization that the college, with its experiences and insights of history, can now take flight. In that perspective, the published volumes on ecumenism and the college's history become living and liberating texts. By situating itself in the resistance tradition of the Pacific people, taking the decisive path to liberate itself by its acknowledgment of the Suvavou people as the traditional owners of the land it was built, and inspired by the PCLM's re-conceptualized ecumenical vision, the college, perhaps for the first time, has claimed its self-belief. The college's 2020-2025 strategic plan seems to indicate this.

The reframing of the college's history must include designing validation processes of its own living histories. There is, of course, a place for the scientific

history method, but it should not be the framework to how the Pacific islands perceive history, the processes and methods of recording history and its key principles, and how these are to be learned and taught in schools and higher learning institutions, such as in the college. The Pacific needs its own enquiry and validation processes, which can be collectively constructed and shared, as Lal (2007, 199) writes,

[L]et us engage with the Pacific's past as well as its present in the intelligent language of ordinary discourse. Let us continue to search for tangible, verifiable and knowable truths with passion and imagination. Let us once again proclaim the fundamental truth that History matters. Let us, finally, recognise that it is within our reach to make of History what we like, including arcane and irrelevant. And dead.

It has been argued that the time of mega narratives is over. The neoliberal narrative of the twentieth century would also be for the twenty-first century. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan made sure of that by their 'no alternative' position with regards to history, culture, politics, development and economics. The liberalisation of the individual from institutionalisation to pursue their interests and, hence, realise their full potential as individual human beings, and the unlocking of science and knowledge from their moral moorings, are and will be the cornerstones to the full realisation of human freedom and happiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bauman 2007; Lyotard 1984). But, as the Covid-19 pandemic tragically reveals, the neoliberal narrative has not led to either, but to human despair and loneliness, social disintegration, ecological destruction, and to what Havea (2013, 2-5) calls a 'context of insecurity' insofar as the Pacific is concerned. In response, he advanced the need for a regional counter narrative (Havea 2013, 2-5). In relation to the college, and while it is important that it continues to train its students to research and write their own churches and countries' histories, it is equally important, that it actively engages in defining this counter regional narrative. The agency for such a narrative cannot be emphasised enough. This is what Hau'ofa (1993) has tried to do in his rather poignant publication *Our Sea of Islands*.

Finally, the college should rightfully celebrate its fifty-fifth anniversary, paying warm tribute and affectionate acknowledgement to the church leaders whose vision it was to establish the college, and its kind compliments to those who have



gone through the college, many of whom became leaders of their churches, communities and in politics. But it should also celebrate its self-realisation and self-belief that its history, from where it stands today and looking back at the last fifty-five years, is liberating and living. It has the confidence, insights, experience, the tools, and now a strategic plan, vision and a concept of ecumenism as an 'household', to reframe its story of the last fifty-five years, and in the process become active participants in its own liberation.

The frigate the bird is perched on the EDGE, ready to take flight, and to glide gracefully through the harbour where the frigate the warship is anchored, no longer fearful but confident to engage with the world on equal terms.

### References

Assmann, Aleida. 2011. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Assmann, Jan. 1987. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity". *New German Critique*, 65:125-133.

Bauman, Z. 2007. *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press.

Benegas Lynch Jr., Alberto y Jackisch, Carlota. 2002. *Librecambio y división de poderes*. Fundación Friedrich A. von Hayek y Ediciones Lumiere, Buenos Aires.

Benegas Lynch Jr., Alberto. 1994. *Nacionalismo: Cultura de la Incultura*. Laissez Faire Nro. 2, Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1954. *Historical Inevitability*. London, New York: Oxford University Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*. Henry Hardy and Roger Housheer (eds.). London: Chatto & Windus.
- Butselaar, Jan van. 2016. "The Ecumenical Movement: Why Violence, Why Not Peace?" In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*. Edited by Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond. UK: Wiley Blackwell and Sons Ltd.
- Carr, E.H. 2001. *What is History?* Reprinted with New Introduction. Wiltshire: PALGRAVE.
- Chambers, Kenneth. 2008. "Ratu Epeli Kanakana v A-G for Fiji (The Suvavou Case): Blending Equitable Relief with Judicial Review". *Journal of South Pacific Law*, 12(1):111-119.
- Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific. 1961. "Beyond the Reef: Records of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific – Malua Theological College, Western Samoa". International Missionary Council, London.
- Diaz, Vicente M. 2010. *Repositioning the Missionary: Rewriting the Histories of Colonialism, Native Catholicism, and Indigeneity in Guam*. University of Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Ernst, Manfred. 1994. *Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Conference of Churches.
- Ernst, Manfred (ed). 2006. *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*. Suva, Fiji: The Pacific Theological College.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. "Changing Christianity in Oceania: A Regional Overview". *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*. No. 157:29-45.
- Ernst, Manfred and Lydia Johnson (eds). 2017. *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands Since the 1980s*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College.
- Evans, Richard. 2001. *Introduction to the 2001 edition of What is History by H.E. Carr*. Wiltshire: PALGRAVE.

Fithian, Lisa. 2020. *Imagining Protest in a Quarantined World*. Interview with Kelly Hayes by Kelly Hayes, Truthout, 20 April. Retrieved from <https://truthout.org/audio/imagining-protest-in-a-quarantined-world/>.

Forman, Charles W. 1969. "Theological education in the South Pacific Islands: a quiet Revolution". *Journal de la Société des océanistes*. tome 25:151-167.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1982. *The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Orbis Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1986. *The Voice of Many Waters: The Story of the Life and Ministry of the Pacific Conference of Churches in the Last 25 years*. Suva, Fiji: Lotu Pasifika Productions.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1990. "The Pacific Ecumenical Scene". *Pacific Journal of Theology*. Series II, No. 4: 26.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2005. "Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 29, No. 3:115-122.

Fry, Greg. 2019. *Framing the Islands: Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism*. The Australian National University: ANU Press.

Garrett, John. 1982. *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*. Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches and the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*. Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches and the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania Since World War II*. Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches and the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific.

Hau'ofa, Epeli. 1993. "Our Sea of Islands". In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*. Edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu and Epeli Hau'ofa. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific.

Havea, Tevita. 2013. "An Alternative Passage on Familiar Waters". Unpublished paper presented at the Pacific Conference of Churches 10th General Assembly, Honiara, Solomon Islands: March.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2018. "Uncharted Course in Familiar Waters". Unpublished paper presented at the Pacific Conference of Churches 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Auckland, New Zealand: October.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2020. "The Story of our Pacific Household in the 'New Normal'". Unpublished paper presented as the vision of the Pacific Church Leaders in response to a Call for Vision by the Pacific Conference of Churches, Pacific Theological College and the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

Hayek, Friedrich A. von. 1988. *The Fatal Conceit. The Errors of Socialism*. W. W. Bartley III (ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hoof't, W.A.Viller. 1967. "The Genesis of the World Council of Churches". In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*. Edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephan C. Neill. Second Edition. London: SPCK.

Iber, Patrick. 2018. "Worlds Apart: How neoliberalism shapes the global economy and limits the power of democracies". *The New Republic*, 23 April. Retrieved from <https://newrepublic.com/article/147810/worlds-apart-neoliberalism-shapes-global-economy>

Kessler, Diane and Michael Kinnamon. 2002. *Councils of Churches and the Ecumenical Vision*. Geneva: WCC.

Kinnamon, Michael. 2003. *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How it Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press.

Koshy, Ninan. 1994. *Churches in the World of Nations: International Politics and the Mission and Ministry of the Church*. Geneva: WCC.

Lal, Brij V. 2007. "Pacific history matters". *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*. 125:193-200.





Lange, Raeburn. 2005. *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Island Christianity*. Christchurch, Canberra, Sydney: MacMillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies and Pandanus Books.

Lyotard, J-F. 1984. *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mamak, Alexander and Grant McCall (eds). 1978. *Paradise Postponed: Essays on Research and Development in the South Pacific*. Rushcutters Bay: Pergamon Press.

Maude, H.E. 1971. "Pacific History: Past, present and future". *Journal of Pacific History*. 6:3-24.

Monbiot, George. 2007. "How the neoliberals stitched up the wealth of nations for themselves". *The Guardian*, 28 August. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/aug/28/comment.businesscomment>

Nicole, Robert. 2006. *Disturbing History: Aspects of Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji, 1874 – 1914*. Canterbury: University of Canterbury.

Nokise, Feleterika and Holger Szesnat (eds). 2015. *Oceanic Voyagers in Theology and Theological Education*. Suva: Pacific Theological College.

Pacific Church Leaders Meeting. 2017. "Sowing a New Seed of Pacific Ecumenism". Unpublished Statement of Basis and Resolution issued in Nadi, 12 October.

Pacific Conference of Churches. 1966. *Report of the First Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Lifou, New Caledonia*. Suva: PCC.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *Towards an Island of Hope: The Pacific Churches' Response on Alternatives to Globalisation*. Fiji: PCC.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2010. "Re-Thinking the Household of God in the Pacific: Concept Paper to Island Leaders". Retrieved from <http://www.actnowpng.org/sites/default/files/Re-thinking%20Oceania%20pc.pdf>

Pacific Theological College. 2020. *Towards Excellence in Theological Education for Leadership for Justice*. Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025, Suva: Pacific Theological College.

Ravier, Adrian Osvaldo. 2009. "Globalisation and Peace: A Hayekian Perspective". *Libertarian Paper*. Vol 1, Art. No. 10:1-18.

Reynaud, Daniel. 2006. "South Pacific Cultures and the Concept and Practice of History". *Journal of Pacific Adventist History*. 6 (1):5-10.

Rigney, Ann. 2012. *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sacks, Jonathan. 2002. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. New York, London: Continuum.

Sasha, David. 2003. "Cultural Diversity without Moral Relativism: A Review Essay of the Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks". *The Edah Journal*. 3.2 / Elul 5763:1-15

Talapusi, Faitala. 1994. "The Future of Theology in the Pacific." Unpublished paper presented at the EATWOT Conference on 14 September, Suva, Fiji.

Tamm, Marek. 2013. "Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies". *History Compass*. 11/6: 458–473.

Tawney, R.H. 1938. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism-A Historical Study*. Pelican Edition. London: Purnell and Sons Ltd.

Tora, Talei. 2020. "Two piglets for a kayak: Fiji returns to barter system as Covid-19 hits economy". *The Guardian*. 8 May. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/two-piglets-for-a-kayak-fiji-returns-to-barter-system-as-covid-19-hits-economy>.

Tuilovoni, Setareki A. 1962. *The Church Unity in the South Pacific*. New York: Union Theological Seminary.

Va'ai, Upolu. 2019. *"We Are Therefore We Live": Pacific Eco-Relational Spir-*

\_\_\_\_\_. 2020. *The Sea or Saving Lives.* Suva: The Fiji Times, 16 March.

World Council of Churches. 1993. *Costly Unity: A World Council of Churches Consultation on Koinonia and Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.* Geneva: WCC.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2005a. *From Harare to Porto Alegre 1998-2006: An Illustrated Account of the Life of the World Council of Churches.* Geneva: WCC.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2005b. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the way to a common statement.* Faith and Order Paper 198. Geneva: WCC.

---



**Rev. Prof. Dr Upolu Lumā Vaai**

*Principal and Professor  
of Theology & Ethics of  
the Pacific Theological  
College*

## ***Relational Theologising***

### **Why Pacific Islanders Think and Theologise Differently**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Theology, in particular contextual theology in the Pacific, has definitely matured. For more than four decades we've been talking about contextual theology in the light of the interwoven strands of *text* and *context*. However, it has matured within what Bishop Leslie Boseto, from the Solomon Islands, in the last three decades called the Eurocentric "theological pod". Meanwhile, its far reaching roots have been struggling after many years to find the dirtified touch of the Pacific soil outside of the pod (1985, 21). Hence we find here the struggle of many islanders to discover an originality, a criticality, and a theological prowess that is rooted in Pacific life-affirming values. The problem relates to a weak Pacific hermeneutics. Theological newness de-



depends on hermeneutical daring: daring to think differently, to disturb the normal, to liberate the oppressed, to re-right the wrong way that has been imposed as the correct way, and to deconstruct the very values and pedagogies we claim to be *indigenous* and the *fairest of them all* that have already been cloned by the imperial centres.

Theologising in many local theological institutions, while slowly recovering from the colonial theological agenda, has continually revered conventional ways of theologising to satisfy the *onefication* agenda of the gospel of uniformity promoted by the centres of knowledge. This way focuses less on how to navigate complexity and ignores how relationship is critical to such an endeavour. This article aims to highlight that because of the important role of relationality in navigating the complexity with which many Pacific islanders have experienced, they often think and theologise differently. And because of this fact, theological education needs to go through a *de-onefication* process. It needs to adjust and locate the relational dynamics in Pacific thinking and spirituality in order to give the islanders the power to articulate and analyse as islanders and not as foreigners; the freedom to be creative without fear of being policed; and the passion to be deeply rooted in our ever flowing trans-generational life-affirming values.

### **So what is Relational Theology?**

Relational theology is a theology of complexity. It is about dancing imaginatively to the complex yet relational tune and rhythm of God's life with us. In this dance we become free to reposition ourselves in the interweaving of words, movements, sounds, patterns, bodies, meanings, and issues. Without directives and strict boundaries, it invites us to twirl away freely and unapologetically from the controlled dancing grounds dictated by the centres of knowledge. It allows us to rediscover God already dancing with us to the rhythms of life, expressed in little practices such as fishing, planting, oral stories, feasting, and birthing to name a few. A theological dance informed by the silent whispers of the *vanua* (land) and the graceful movements of *vaitafe* (flowing rivers), transformed by the fluidity and unpredictability of the *moana* (ocean), animated by the *mānava ola* (breath of life) of the *vaomatua* (the elder forest), and dirtified by the rising dust from the *malae*, the ceremonial grounds of the Pacific dirt communities. A dance fused with oral stories, theologies, music, laughter, art and poetry from the village fields, and replenished by the waters and smoke of earth rituals. Theology as an imaginative dance finds its pulse in the recognition

of the multi-strandic dynamics of interwoven strands of life such as universality and particularity, communality and individuality, the living and the dead, and the seen and unseen. To create a new world and a new liberating story, theology should assist communities to reimagine God. One who is the source for an *all-ness* mindset often obscured by an obsession to achieve one-ness. Relational theology ceases to be a liberating force if it fails to address the injustices of the single-strandic development models preached by the gospel of uniformity disguised in the form of familiar faces, normal habits, and typical structures.

### Single-strandic Theologising

For almost thirty years swimming and fishing in the *moana* of Pacific theological education, more and more I am convinced that theology in our region is still enslaved by the conventional single-strandic approach of theologising. In our God-talk for example, we teach students to adopt single-strandic thinking as they define and prove whether God systematically fits into split categories such as *a priori* or *a posteriori*, objective or subjective, substance or relation, pure or dirt, male or female, process or solitary. In Christology we teach students to prove whether Christ systematically fits into categories of either divinity or humanity, centre or margin, individual or community, history or faith. In this either/or approach to theology, often Pacific students get to choose the more powerful categories such as divine, centre, male, objective, pure, solitary. Those who opt for the less powerful categories are either told they are wrong or condemned as heretics.

Hence Pacific Christology has in fact lost its subversive and unsettling nature. Theologians in the Mainline churches often favour writing on Christology that leans towards the lordship of Christ at the expense of Jesus' justice-oriented mission as a liberator and defender of the weak. Pacific contextual Christologies revolve around a lot of power and the monarchical language of lordship. This is seen for example when in theologising servanthood, Christ is often perceived first as a *Tui* as king or *Turanga* as chief (Tuwere 2010, 51-59) and a *Taufalealii* as high chief (Tuivanu 2013) before he is perceived as a servant. In this way of thinking, lordship must always precede servanthood. The question is whether Jesus can become a servant without ever being a *Tui* or *Turanga*? With an emphasis on the inspirational power of the Spirit on individuals, this lordship language is even more popular in the Charismatic and Pentecostal spaces where Christ is often declared as Lord and Saviour merely for individuals. While this often

works to boost family piety and individual morality, it usually falls short when it comes to resisting and transforming unjust social and religious structures.

Single-strandic theologising often uses the *onefication* tool as a talisman to achieve a single answer or an ultimate fact. Controlled by the gospel of uniformity, we who use this tool are often busy with fending off that which thinks and acts differently. As a result we demonise anything that does not conform to such gospel's principles of truth. But have we thought about asking students to rethink the concept of truth? To ask what kind of truth? Whose truth? And who benefits from such truth? *Onefication* is not about truth, but rather the control of truth. It is lazy energy. It removes God to the realm of lordship and objective logic and away from the real struggles and suffering of the world. It dismisses multiple stories and makes one story the only story. It strives to make visible the face of the one by making invisible the face of the many. This is in fact the real meaning of colonisation, which comes from the word *colon* meaning *to digest*. Theology in the Pacific has been a slave to this *colon narrative* where only one culture, one way, one dance, or one destination digests all others in the name of an ultimate truth.

I do not question the importance of a thinking that emphasises systems and categories. However, I question the single-strandic mentality that comes with it and how it is imposed as the *only way* to understand reality. While the single-strandic approach to theology has its own place in the history of theological discourse in the West especially with relation to its philosophical tradition, it is ill-equipped to diagnose theological and social problems, not to mention offering healthy alternatives. Pacific theologising runs on it because it is abundant, familiar, and easy to use to control others, even though it's unsustainable. Hence Pacific theologising has maintained a dichotomous categorisation that finds pleasure in splitting and eliminating strands of the mat of life, favouring the one truth over multi-strandic relationships, legitimacy of traditional methods over stories, literary over orality, archival preservation over real life experience, linearity over complexity, hegemony over multiplicity and diversity, and pure academia over life. The result is that theology has become an upper class product that weaponises the powerful while at the same time endorsing a culture of conformity for little people, little practices, and little things.

## Multi-strandic Theologising

If we theologise from the *itulagi* ('side of the heavens' or 'side of the horizons') of Pacific relationality, then it definitely looks very different (Vaai & Casimira 2017, 6). Most Pacific islanders think in terms of complexity, multiplicity, and negotiability. Their minds are engineered not only according to the rhythms of relationships with the land, ocean, trees, strangers, and the divine but also from the ground- up. So if multiplicity, complexity, and negotiability are in our blood, why do we seem to be obsessed with a single-strandic approach to theologising? Is it because for many years we have been controlled by the rules and methods of *onefication*? Or is it because theological education in the Pacific is not doing enough?

For Pacific theology to promote wellbeing, it needs to dance to the rhythms of complexity, multiplicity, and negotiability. It needs to understand the multifarious nature of life, to be dirtified by the local soil and replenished by the multiple colours of the land (Havea 2019, 1ff), to bathe in the river of relational values that provide mana to the grassroots communities. To do this, before we try to define the *theos* (God), which often ends up abstractive and single-strandic, we need to relate first with the *logos*, the Word, the divine story made flesh, that is already part of our stories, our struggles, and our life with each other. To avoid prying into the "inner life" of God of which we know nothing about and of which this single-strandic approach has forced us to do (LaCunga 1991, 2f), we need to start first with what we know. Our life. Our story. Who we are. Where we come from. How we see the world. Because the story of God is deeply interwoven with our stories through Christ in the Spirit, knowing our story opens up a mutual God-Us encounter that allows us to dance into the mystery of God in our own way. This is something that Leonardo Boff reminded us about, more than four decades ago, that we cannot define divine mystery unless we understand our own particularities, already part of such mystery, in order to reveal a "new face especially known and loved by us" (1978, 32).

This is also something I have learned from my forebears. That we cannot define the ocean unless we understand first and foremost that the ocean is in our own blood. So Epeli Hauofa was correct to argue that "the ocean is us", connected, and woven into our physical and spiritual fabric of life (1993). And Teresia Teiawa is precisely on point when she reminded us that "we sweat and cry salt so we know that the ocean is really in our blood" (Hauofa 2008, 41). How can we

define the ocean, which is a mystery, if we cannot understand the drops of such mystery already present in ourselves? To relate to the mystery, we must understand the place of the mystery within our own living stories. It is the realisation of the strands of such mystery, woven into the multiple strands of our stories, that constitutes us. Relational theologising therefore does not elevate the urge to prove an absolute objective truth as its primary task.

## **Matafelefele (Complexity) and the De-Onefication of Theology**

The name of the Methodist parish in central Apia town in Samoa is called *Matafelefele* (*mata* is face or strand and *felefele* is complex). The name highlights that a church in a cosmopolitan area such as Apia should make as the focus of its mission working with multiple nationalities and complex political and economic development issues that transpire out of such space. Such is a difficult mission because it calls for creativity to cope with diverse ethnicities and myriad social challenges of cosmopolitanism. Relational theologising finds its heartbeat in the embrace of complexity. This is key to the idea of relationality. A community that practices relationality lives and promotes the *de-onefication* of life. This idea is critical to the renewal of Pacific theology in order to adequately deal with complexity to achieve wellbeing. *Matafelefele* alludes to the fact that creation is a mat of complex faces and strands shaped by complex challenges and issues. Relational theologising therefore is not just about understanding how different strands contribute to the whole, but also about how each strand interacts and interconnects on its own terms thus emerging into a comprehensive and harmonious whole.

This *de-onefication* and embrace of complexity is something that Winston Halapua from Tonga in his *moana* theology offered. We cannot just talk about one ocean at the exclusion of others. The Pacific ocean is distinct yet only finds life through its mutual connectedness to the complex whole represented by other oceans, other lives, and other flows (2008; 2010). Relational theologising is how we should organise our thinking to struggle in understanding how complex strands within a complicated network of life work and find meaning in each other. Creative imagination allows Pacific islanders to think in the *let-be way*, outside of the static archival methods of interpretation, adopting theological nimbleness like the *fuia* bird (starling) that often enjoys being playful and taking risks, jumping from one branch to the other without fear of being controlled. The challenge for theologians is how to redeem themselves from systems and



categories which often force them to remain on one branch of the tree, gifted with only one view of the world. The following stories provide the dynamics of how many Pacific islanders are trained when they grow up to think in complex *modus operandi*, outside of confined and static systems and categories.

### *Oral Stories*

Oral story is the matrix of Pacific knowledge. Therefore it does not bow to a systematic and single- strandic categorisation. It is because orality embraces complexity. It enflames creative imagination. To uphold the beauty of complexity, oral stories often utilise the method of allusion through the use of idioms and metaphors to promote creative imagination and to protect us from the scientific obsession for specificity which often leads to systematic sharp categorization. “Allusion, allegory, and metaphor are linguistic tools that have the ability to make meaning, to privilege beauty, relatedness and keep the sacredness of the other”, according to Tui Atua (2018, 106). For example, the usage of particular birds, fish, trees, rivers, even spirits in stories are all significant because they represent reality and life for the different communities. Fish for example in most Fijian communities represents identity and for most Polynesia countries it is resilience. Trees for most Pacific islands represent motherhood or life. Rivers often represent fluidity and movement. Spirits represent mana. In this sense, oral stories do not focus on seeking an absolute definition of these but rather on allowing space to reimage life through ongoing reflections and assessments and in that space allows the characters and movements in the story to inform us of our responsibilities to each other. In this respect, theology grows out of stories, whether it is the biblical creation story, the Scottish general Macbeth in Shakespeare’s story, or the story of Fiji’s great flood because two boys killed *Turukawa*, the favourite hawk that belonged to the god *Degei* (Reed and Hames 1967, 3-7). To C.S. Song, “Story contains within itself seeds of theology. It is the task of theology to identify theological seeds in stories, investigate the environment in which they have grown, inquire ways in which they impact people and their surroundings as they grow” (2011, 18).

In the theological arena, this orality approach is adopted by many Pacific theologians. For example, when the bird called the *toloa* is used in stories or theological articulation, it often represents the story of God being part of the stories of migration and of the identity crisis experienced by many diasporic communities (Aiava 2017). When a coconut is used, it is symbolic of a cyclical

and dynamic way of life that embraces the “lowest possible level” of the most vulnerable and the poorest of communities who wholly depend on the coconut tree to live. In Sione ‘Amanaki Havea’s classic coconut theology, it simply repositions God to be inclusive of the stories of centuries of struggle of the coconut people under colonisation (1987, 11-15). When a *umu* (lovo or earth oven) is used, it represents the multiple functions and responsibilities as “it lies at the heart of communal life”, from planning and preparation, to convergence, and to celebration when a *umu* is cooked. With its “capacity to exercise a representative metaphorical role”, *umu* theology therefore evolve from the ground, from what the people do together daily and are parts of their everyday lives (Vilitama 2015, 212).

Theologians fashioned by the single-strandic approach often struggle to understand complex thinking. They struggle for example to understand why trees, rivers, ocean, mountains, rocks, people, and ancestors are central themes and analogies in island thinking. This is because orality goes against *onefication* and therefore all of these characters equally represent something about our stories of struggle and our encounter with the divine and about our responsibilities in it. Orality has a lot to teach theology about inclusiveness and embrace. It does not promote the *central character* culture that is clearly visible in Hollywood movies. Against this kind of ‘Hollywood model’ of life that aims to create a single hero and victor, to sensationlise one conqueror, to pave one destination, or to reach one solitary truth, relational theologising allows space for all the faces or characters to be seen and recognised.

This is why the Eurocentric idea of hunting for *facts* is problematic because it often takes a single-strandic approach, controlled by the scientific *literary urge* that often splits between fact and fiction. In the African context for example, Lavinya Stennett argues that the legacy of Eurocentric academia has “continued to determine the parameters of knowledge production and decided that the literary mode of documenting and passing down knowledge is the only legitimate form” (2019, 3). This direction, which is still promoted by mainstream theological education in the Pacific, disqualifies other ways used by many cultures to pass down knowledge such as oral traditions and stories. Most often in this trend for example, the first researcher to document an event or history is consecrated by the academia as the *authentic source* to be respected as the authority and measure of knowledge for any following generation. This idea goes back to the *doctrine of precedence* born out of Western colonial jurisprudence

and is still very much popular today in court houses and promoted by education systems. This topic is for another time. But if Eurocentric research tools and analytical models are used based on the idea of *documenting the experience of the islanders* as opposed to *living the experience of the islanders*, and if the researcher only lived in the researched communities for a very short period of time, then we have a huge problem with what are perceived as facts. In this context, facts are merely the researcher's own perception of the researched community, not the community's. Thus this desire for written sources as the authentic historical facts often mutes the inherent racism promoted by this *doctrine of precedence* and the conventional education system for years.

I do not question the importance of facts. However, I question the scope and approach used to achieving facts. Relational theologising aims at broadening the scope of the so-called *facts* and *truth* so that these are not limited to printed sources. Otherwise the print cultures will continue to dictate how to understand many cultures that live and breathe orality. In fact multiplicity of sources and perspectives is not a threat to truth or historical facts but rather an enrichment. In the Pacific worldview, because it is not bound to written sources, truth is always relational. In Christianity, it is in our relationship with Christ and with one another that gives us a sense of that divine truth. Epeli Hau'ofa reminds us that because of relationality "truth is always flexible and negotiable, despite attempts by some of us to impose political, religious, and other forms of absolutism" (2020, 454). Because truth is found in the process of seeking wisdom, Hau'ofa's claim resonates well with the Samoan wisdom *ole uta ale poto e fetala'i ao le uta ale vale e taofimau* meaning "the wisdom of the wise is negotiable while the wisdom of the fool is fixed". Hence any story, theology, or history that is fixed is ill-equipped to offer a liberating story. Theological education should first address the racism and injustice of misrepresentation in promoting fixed notions of truth, even locating and deconstructing the absolute power that comes with it.

### *Wellbeing Stories*

A full realisation of wellbeing can be realised through the embrace of complexity. Which is why complexity is integral to the process of seeking wisdom in the Pacific. Achieving wellbeing involves a lengthy and time consuming process of struggling to consult the complex strands of life. It is a process that should ensure minimum consequences on life as a whole. It involves consulting the land, the ocean, the people, and the vision of ancestors. Asking critical questions in

this process is important in order to achieve wisdom. The current voting system, while it works for democratic settings, sometimes lacks this culture of questioning especially when it rushes to decisions. In Samoa for example, there is a wisdom process called *moe le toa* (let the *toa* sleep) where deliberation would be proposed to the next day when a solid decision is not reached. The *toa* is a tree used for creating durable weapons. For the sake of durability it needs to sleep in water in a lengthy period of time to ensure it is tough to achieve its purpose. The more it sleeps the more it is durable.

This metaphor is used for decision making in the sense that the more time a decision is challenged with questions in consultation with the earth and communities, the more it is durable, one that has less consequences; one that carefully navigates through complexity to achieve a comprehensive and harmonious whole. Wellbeing (*laumalie*, *lagimalie*, *manuia*) is achieved only through ongoing questioning, consultative discernment, and critical dialogue with the whole. This willingness to question and consult with a discerning and listening resolve is key to a theologising that embraces complexity. It is key to a theology of wellbeing. The goal of questioning is not to achieve an absolute answer, but rather a check and balance mechanism where all of life is embraced and upheld with mutual respect and dignity. Respect therefore is not the absence of questions as it is wrongly assumed by many in the Pacific. It is rather in the questioning of the status quo and the willingness to listen with discernment that respect is achieved.

We see here elements of Martin Heidegger's "being in the world", Hans Georg Gadamer's logic of question and answer in his "dialogical approach", and also elements of Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" where we are called to suspect and listen at the same time. This is not to use Western philosophies to validate Pacific ways of knowing, but rather to point out that the Pacific equally had its own inherent social analytical tools, hermeneutical processes of questioning, and critical engagement—one that students of theology seem to neglect when theologising. Relational theologising requires islanders to dig deeper into what is theirs if the goal is to achieve wellbeing in a way that is sustainable to their own communities. I have shared in my other published works, for example, the Samoan triadic analytical process of *liuliu* (turn to question and deconstruct), *lilii* (turn to action and reconstruct), and *toe liulii* (re-turn to the initial phase of questioning) which is more meaningful when a Samoan person analyses or theologises (Vaai 2017, 35-37). Both Western and Pacific knowledge and

hermeneutical tools should be considered as distinctive yet interrelated strands woven next to each other in the story of theology.

One of the core reasons why Pacific islanders employ this time consuming process of consultative questioning and critical engagement, especially in relation to economic and development activities, is because of the mutuality of life. Because everything relates, therefore everything lives. The land, ocean, trees, ancestors mutually connect to each other and to us. As a living *aiga* (cosmic family), they exist *in* us and we *in* them. Hence, even the dead live in and around us. That is why most Pacific islanders read history as a living relationship. It is never deemed a frozen past or a dead tradition. Albert Wendt in the 1970s questioned the use of the term “traditional” as in traditional art or traditional practices. Such vocabularies are linked to the Eurocentric colonial way of thinking that treats the past and cultures as static and archival-bound. A past that is preserved in museums and library shelves, dead and impure (1976, 50). In relational theologising, everything around us, seen and unseen, dead and alive, are members of a vibrant living *aiga*. Hence, in such *aiga* we are never mere individuals. *We are*, therefore *we live* (Vaai 2019). Thus in theologising we should wrestle to articulate from the perspective of life how the individual is part of the *aiga* and how the *aiga* is imaged in the individual. The wellbeing of both are critical.

This sense of wellbeing and mutual responsibility is expressed in tattoos, for example: in many Pacific tattooing cultures, what is tattooed on bodies is not just mere art or designs. Rocks, ocean, mountains, fish, house, rivers, combs, navigational tools, canoes, to name a few, are inscribed representations of a wider vision of wellbeing. Tattoo is the visual representation of unseen realities, even some claim it is the “embodiment and institution of *Atua*” (Maliko 2012, vi). They are not only to remind the tattooed people of their deep connection to a wider living *aiga*, both visible and invisible, but also of their immediate responsibilities. While tattoo patterns represent the different complex strands of culture, family, economy, and spirituality, the inscriptions on an individual body provide the language of responsibility to the wider living body. These inscriptions should also impact on everyday decision making, and actions, reminding their wearers to take an *all-ness* approach to life for the sake of wellbeing.

Tevita Mohenoa Puloka from Tonga has also been talking about *de-onefication* in a different way. He used what he calls “a straight line is a curve” (Puloka 2007). For Puloka, the way Tongans and many Pacific islanders think and do



things is never linear. Using the metaphor of the clothesline, “when unit of laundry hangs on the clothesline the line is fairly straight but when 50 units hang on the line, it curves” (61). In other words, for Puloka the straight line represents those who take the single-strandic linear approach to evaluate life. They always see life through the lens of a singular unit comprised only of the “I”. The curve represents a more relational multi-strandic approach to life and wellbeing, one that is never confined to systems and categories. It sees life through the lens of the living *aiga* comprised of the “We” where the “I” is an integral part of that “We”. For this reason, any decision making will have to take a curved approach which involves a long process of consultation to ensure the wellbeing of the “We”, such as the trees, land, ocean, and ancestors which are normally counted to exist outside of the mainstream straight line of thinking.

### *Gender Stories*

One of the common issues throughout the history of Christianity is the naming of God. The debates on the traditional patriarchal language of Father, King, or Lord has been rigorously challenged by feminists and has exploded beyond the academic circles to change the shape of the church. But perhaps the greatest challenge came in the use of personal pronouns such as He and She with reference to God. The claim is that this approach allows God to be close as much as possible to our struggle and oppressive experiences. However, Young Lee Hertig warns that such an approach, despite its many positive impacts, is just as guilty as patriarchy because it has used the very fuel that powered the patriarchal engine, that is, “dichotomy” (Hertig 2010, 4). When we use pronouns with reference to God, while they disclose the mystery of God in a way that each gender will feel divine presence and love, they also run the risk of trapping God in our gender-centric interests, making God look like us, and therefore depriving others of the same God. Most countries in the Pacific do not have pronouns in their languages. Terms for person such as *tagata*, *tangata*, *kanaka*, *taata* in most Polynesian countries for example are all gender neutral. This is not just to protect intruding and prying into the identity of a person, it is also a reminder of the fluidity of life and the complex intersecting relationships and responsibilities that sharp gender categorisation often neglects. Therefore, many islanders had no problem with the gender of God until they were introduced into this stagnant ‘divine pronoun culture’.

My paternal grandmother won the title of *fai fe’e* (the octopus lady) in her

village. This is because she not only weaves, cooks, and breastfeeds as any ordinary woman would. She has also mastered the art of fishing, a realm normally controlled by men. When she goes fishing, she usually catches many octopuses and fish and then distributes them to the village families. She even has a huge taro plantation in which most of us children hated to work. But we grew up learning from her an *all-ness* approach to life by moving freely between what we now assume to be separate categories: domestic vs municipal, private vs collective, masculinity vs femininity, or land vs ocean. And from that fluidity, while maintaining and respecting these different complex strands of life, my grandmother in her own way practiced *de-onefication* by resisting a sharp separation of these, even the separation of roles as proposed by many anthropologists who studied Samoa according to their own analytical models. When Elizabeth Johnson published her famous book *She Who Is* (1992) perhaps to counter E.L. Mascall book *He Who Is* (1943), it highlighted a war that continues to this day over which gender category fits God better. Perhaps for my grandmother, while it suits our scientific interest in defining and understanding God through our specific human language experience, a single-strandic understanding of God as either He or She is not only humanistic and divisive, but overlooks what mats always teach us. That is, one strand while maintaining its uniqueness, always flows into the other, creating a pattern that exists and finds meaning only because of the different intersecting and overlapping strands. The challenge is whether Pacific islanders have the courage or are even allowed by academia to use this fluid relational approach when talking about God.

## Conclusion

Relational theologising re-situates theology to embrace the importance of complexity and multi-strandic ways of understanding reality. These ways have already been gifted by God to the Pacific people. It is just that theological educators need to be more open minded, to be free from a single-strandic approach that aims at achieving absolute truth with solitary facts. Educators need to shift from the notion of *teaching* to *mentoring*. The former still carries the elements of imposing knowledge with the teacher as the one who knows it all. The latter means that the mentor is also a learner who walks besides the learners, learning from them and allowing space for their own becoming. As educators we need to learn enough to learn that we do not know enough.

Our theological education needs to go through a *de-onefication* review process

in order to allow space for islanders to be imaginative and creative. We need to mentor them to discover their inherent gifts and potentialities: to be fluid yet critical; to seek the mystery themselves rather than defining it for them; to identify the seeds of theology in their local stories; to shift from one-ness to *all-ness*, must-be to *let-be*, regulation to *imagination*, single-strand to *multi-strand*; and to have an energy to reconstruct a new theology that dares to dance differently from the tunes of global theologies. Unless we move away from the *onefication* agenda of the gospel of uniformity, theological education will never serve its purpose of liberating life and offering wellbeing. It has to free itself from the perception of having a controlling centre that polices and gives a final approval before something is declared *authentic*. It has to resist theological models forged from the holy corridors of a powerful academic elite who declares these models as the *only way for all*.

Having said this, it is equally important for theological education in the Pacific to carefully navigate through this relational theologising so that it not be divisive and exclusive. We have to be reminded that the relational way is *not* the only way to dance theologically. It is *not* the only strand in the mat of theology. While a multi-strandic complex approach to theology embraces and recognises the distinctiveness of all strands, it must ensure that these strands find a way to talk to each other in an honest and constructive way. Even if the other is the coloniser or the abuser! Relational theologising is not about elimination but rather invitation. Not about condemnation but celebration. It imagines and envisions how to tell the same story of God in a different way. A relational way. A way that offers salvation for all creation rather than just for one colour, one culture, or one creature such as the human.

## References

Aiava, Faafetai. 2017. "Alofa Relations: A Quest for an Alternative Theology for the Samoa Diaspora". PhD Thesis. Suva: Pacific Theological College.

Boff, Leonardo. 1978. *Jesus Christ the Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*. London: SPCK.

Boseto, Leslie. Cited by Sione 'Amanaki Havea. 1985. "Pacific Theology". In *Towards a Relevant Pacific theology: The Role of the Churches and Theological Education*. Suva: Pacific Theological College.

Halapua, Winston. 2008. *Waves of God's Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*. London: Canterbury Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2010 "A Moana Rhythm of Well-Being". In *Spirit Possession, Theology, and Identity: A Pacific Exploration*. Edited by Elaine M Wainwright et.al. Hindmarsh: ATF.

Hau'ofa, Epeli. 1993. "Our Sea of Islands." In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hauofa. Suva: The University of the South Pacific.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2020. "Epilogue: Pasts to Remember". In *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Edited by Robert Borofsky. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Havea, Jione. 2019. "The Land has Colours". In *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies*. Edited by Jione Havea. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Havea, Sione 'Amanaki. 1987. "Christianity in the Pacific Context". In *South Pacific Theology*. Oxford Regnum Books.

Hertig, Young Lee. 2010. "The Asian American Alternative to Feminism: A Yinist Paradigm". In *Mirrored Reflections: Reframing Biblical Characters*. Edited by Young Lee Hertig and Chloe Sun. Oregon: WIPF & STOCK.

Johnson, Elizabeth. 1992. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. 1991. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

Maliko, Tavita. 2012. "Ole Soga'imiti: An Embodiment of God in the Samoan Male Body". PhD Thesis. Auckland: The University of Auckland.

Mascall, E.L. 1943. *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*. London: Libra Book.

Puloka, Tevita Mohenoa. 2007. "In Tonga, a Straight Line is a Curve: Poetry as

Metaphor is a Tongan Theology of Conservation”. *Pacific Journal of Theology* 38:59-69.

Reed, A.W. and Inez Hames. 1967. *Myths and Legends of Fiji*. Auckland: Reeds Books.

Stennett, Lavinya. 2019. “West Africa’s oral histories tell us a more complete story than traditional post-colonial narratives”. Downloaded from <https://qz.com/africa/1770108/west-africas-oral-history-griots-tell-a-more-complete-story/>

Song, C.S. 2011. *In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts: Story Theology*. Oregon: Cascade Books.

Teresia Teaiwa, cited by Epeli Hauofa. 2008. *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

Tuivanu Tuivanu. 2013. “Taufalealii: Reorienting Theology of Leadership, Towards Mission in the Methodist Church in Samoa”. MTh Thesis. Suva: Pacific Theological College.

Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi. 2008. “In Search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor in Social Policy”. In *Su’esu’e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*. Edited by Tamasa’ilau M. Sualii-Sauni et.al. Wellington: Huia Press.

Tuwere, Sevati. 2010. “Jesus as Tui (King) and Turaga (Chief)”. *Concilium* 5:51-59.

Vaai, Upolu Luma. 2017. “Relational Hermeneutics: A Return to the Relationality of the Pacific Itulagi as a Lens for Understanding and Interpreting Life”. In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Luma Vaai & Aisake Casimira. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2019. *We Are Therefore We Live: Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Change Story*. Japan: Toda Peace Institute. Policy Brief No.56.



Vaai, Upolu Luma and Aisake Casimira (eds). 2017. *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

Vilitama, Matagi. 2015. "On Becoming a Liquid Church: Singing the Niuean 'Fetuaiga Kerisiano' on a Distant Shore". PhD Thesis. Sydney: Charles Sturt University.

Wendt, Albert. 1976. "Towards a New Oceania". *Mana Review: A South Pacific Journal of Language and Literature* 1:49-60.

---

## ***Veikau (Forest/Wild) Theological Pedagogy for Transformative Encounter in Fiji***



**Rev. Taniela Balenaikorodawa**

*A doctoral candidate at PTC, he is an iTaukei ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji. Previously worked as a Church Ministry lecturer at the Davuilevu Theological College.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper offers an insight into Matthew 4:1-11, a famous text of an incredible narration of Jesus' face-to-face encounter with the devil but with a reading from a Fijian<sup>1</sup> lens that offers fresh perspectives from the 'bush'. Such an approach hopes to give a voice of the *vanua* and be a defender of earth justice and advocacy as central to the Pacific Theological College (PTC) vision.

Before I proceed, a definition of *veikau* ought to be clarified first. *Veikau* simply refers to the forest, timing with life of the wild. It is also a pun which we, the people from the Northern part of the Fiji Islands use as a friendly joke for

our neighbours and *tauvu*<sup>2</sup> from the interior of Vitilevu (particularly Naitasiri and Nadrau) as “*Kai Veikau*”, meaning people from the bush, or from the wild, deemed by the empire to be uncivilized, unschooled, *tamata butobuto* (non-enlightened person or heathen) and *unlotu*. Ronald Gatty’s *Fijian-English Dictionary* explains that when two persons are *tauvu*, they are persuaded to make jokes, play tricks against each other and exchange playful insults (Gatty 2009, 254). Similarly, the *Kai Colo* like *Kai Veikau*, as a term, according to Asesela Ravuvu is “... often used as a snub” (1968, 5).

I am reading this text using the *veikau* (forest) lens, or a bush/wild pedagogy. The inspiration to use the *veikau* concept as a reading lens, emerges from my preference to read the Fijian narration of the text in *Ai Vola Tabu* (*The Holy Bible in Fijian*). This allows for an effective way to understand the narration within the Fijian context as well as provide an interpretation that is culturally relevant.<sup>3</sup> The Fijian translation of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the space called “wilderness” is “*veikau*.”<sup>4</sup> The Fijian *iga* (worldview) or *itulagi* (lifeworld) of the *veikau* needs to be clarified before we dive through the text at hand.

### ***A Kai Colo and a Kai Valagi iga of the Veikau***

Ravuvu looks at the metaphorical aspect of *veikau* by explaining that what is implied in the word “... is the idea that people who inhabit the interior areas are somewhat backward, behind the times and [lived in a] too ‘undeveloped’ world” (1988, 5). Such labelling of a people in the Fijian context is commonly known as “*Kai Colo*” (people from the interior, far from the shoreline which are deemed to be places of “civilization”). Ravuvu clearly describes the metaphorical connotations associated with the *Kai Veikau* or *Kai Colo* people as those who are “unsophisticated, unskilled, ignorant and not smart enough to impress onlookers, [irrespective of what part of the country they come from]” (1988, 5). Ravuvu says that *Kai Veikau/ Kai Colo* is a label given to people who display great curiosity or interest in, even in awe and admiration of new objects and ideas. And this is why we take pleasure to jokingly tease our neighbours in a sarcastic way though as it also strengthens our relationships. Ravuvu states that the concept is a constant reminder to Colo people that “their ways of thinking, feeling and doing things are narrow, limited, localized and inefficient” (1988, 5). This clearly demonstrates how the Eurocentric frame of mind is imposed upon the local and holds them captives. It then leads to low self-esteem, loss of self-dignity, lack of faith in self, and a total imprisonment of the mind and being<sup>5</sup>.



All these words of negative connotations are used with reference to a people whose lives and world revolve around ‘*veikau*’ or the wilderness. However, such worldviews are limiting, biased and lack appropriate understanding of the people’s context. Such views have a heavy western colonial baggage. This is how the imperial world documented our history through their ‘schooled’ opinions imposed upon the ‘*kai veikau*’ or the ‘unschooled’. However, I wish to highlight as we read in verse 1 that “Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness” and particularly note, that ‘*veikau*’ or the ‘*Kai veikau*’ approach is taken by the Spirit in this text. Important questions then ought to be posed here: Why is the Spirit taking Jesus into the *veikau*? What is so peculiar about the *veikau*? Why wasn’t Jesus taken by the Spirit into the city or the Temple in the first place?

The Spirit’s move affirms the *veikau* – though from the ‘empire’s’ perspective, such a space may be unschooled, uncivilized, heathen, *unlotu*, wild and usually associated with darkness; the Spirit led Jesus into this unique space. The very space we would downgrade, devalue, frown at, avoid and demonize; but the Spirit of God thought otherwise and ushered Jesus through this wilderness. Thus, the wilderness or the *veikau* offers something valuable and significantly (alter)native. Ravuvu explicitly but richly describes the “*veikau*” as:

... bush and forest covered hills and valleys, which continue, as in the past, to be foraging and hunting grounds for the people of the village, and from which other resources are extracted. Wild pigs, flying foxes, pigeons, wild yams, fruits and edible leafy plants are hunted and gathered to supplement the daily food supply. Medicinal plants for the treatment of various ailments; timber for digging sticks, dance clubs and spears, knife and axe handles; logs for canoes, firewood and materials for house building are also extracted from nearby bushes and forests. Canes for making baskets and fish-traps, and fibres for making nets, mats, cordage and strainers, and dye for beautifying and decorative work, are in abundant supply in the bush ... (Ravuvu 1988, 4).

A *Kai Colo* or *Kai Veikau* Fijian anthropologist, Ravuvu, understands the relational nature of this space and how intimately it is connected to human sustainability. Such a description of the *veikau*, is a reminder that human survival depends entirely on a thorough orientation on the value of the web of life that the *veikau* offers. It is an offering from the *vanua* which Tuwere claimed

“is the womb out of which people come and into which they return” (2002, 107). This then provides insights into the Spirit’s meta- purpose in taking Jesus to the *veikau*. It is the ‘womb’ where life is nurtured, developed, grows and experiences life within the so called ‘darkness’ nurturing context. This is an important component of ‘a both’ in Pacific relational hermeneutics rooted in values such as ‘practical reciprocity’ (Vaai and Nabobo-Baba 2017, 11). This is well illustrated in the experiences of Professor John Hull:

For me, the loss of sight was also an experience of separation. There is a great divide between the world perceived by sighted people and that perceived by blind people. The two realms are separate. In Genesis, we might think at first that light, once created would abolish the darkness, but this is not what happened; darkness found a place in the night, and the night was separated from the day – separated, but joined (Hull 2001, 1).

It does not compartmentalize its ways of thinking and being but holds ‘both’ together in holistic harmony where the ‘dark-womb’ as a *veikau* metaphor nurtures new life. However, a *Kai Valagi*<sup>6</sup> (European) defines *veikau* or forest as “... the uncultivated lands within the reputed boundaries of the tribe” (Thomson 1968, 362). The western perception of land is viewed in terms of demarcated ‘boundaries’ whereas the Fijian and Oceanic communities take a more relational approach to the same. The *Kai Valagi* views of the *veikau* differs from a *Kai Colo* lens when the former clearly describes the *veikau* to be:

Much of the land was worthless for cultivation, rough, bare hills, from which every scrap of soil had been washed by the summer rains, and on which the scanty herbage was scorched dry by dry winter drought, and burnt annually in the autumn bush fires. To such land as this no value whatever was attached (Thomson 1968, 362).

Thomson as an Englishman, defines *veikau* according to land tenure system valued and weighed within the colonial British laws which is labelled as the “wilderness” or “wasteland”. However, Ravuvu (1988) draws from a rich experience of *veikau*, as a *Kai Colo* himself, a description so unique and so contrary to the Eurocentric view.

However, the *veikau* concept, when one googles up the term, will realize that the



*veikau* concept has been adopted by the Men's Fashion Clothing industry as an international name; the famous "Kai Veikau" brand.<sup>7</sup> The men's wear carrying the Kai Veikau brand is advertised in the industry's website soliciting popularity in the tourism sector. There is also a "Kai Veikau Kava"<sup>8</sup> brand— is claimed to be organically Fijian grown and the farm is located in Savusavu, Vanualevu Island. The eco-tourism development in Fiji and elsewhere is a booming industry where tourists are attracted to pristine and virgin *veikau* creating employment, facilitating livelihood for the local population as well as the economy. These small business enterprises at the local community level strongly support the livelihood of our vulnerable women and children.

In Matthew 4, Jesus is about to begin his mission and ministry; the *Missio Dei*, the very mission of God, but the Spirit takes Jesus into this rather 'long' and lonely journey into the *veikau*. The *Missio Dei*, according to the *veikau* theology, 'involves' or 'includes' venturing and discovering God in the *veikau*, the bush that is deemed unproductive and uncivilized by the city empire people. For the Spirit's participation in leading Jesus in to the *veikau*, signifies that the *Missio Dei* is not achieved until it journeys in to the *veikau*, to experience and live the *veikau* life, and be transformed by the *veikau* worldview. The 'word' who pronounces in the beginning of it all, the *veikau*'s existence, in Genesis 1:11-12 – "Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good" (NIV); is now re-entering this space in the person of Jesus and encounters the *veikau* as it also experiences Jesus. However, the 'good' of the *veikau* has been domesticated, dominated, denied and destroyed by the imperial capitalist driven agenda through its manipulative and abusive policies and worldviews. It is then argued in this article, that it is through the work of the Spirit, Jesus is not only transformed by the presence of the *veikau* (fasting and prayer) but also the *veikau* is transformed by the presence of Jesus/Spirit. This is a two-way transformative encounter of Jesus and the *veikau* which is rooted in the *vanua* relational philosophy of *veidolei* or 'practical reciprocity' (Vaai 2017, 11). This is what Gwayaweng Kiki identified as the "an island-style communal reciprocal approach" as a way of life (Kiki 2017, 45, 48). It is then possible to argue from a Fijian perspective that any theological pedagogy that denies entering in to the *veikau* is not only top down and imperial, but it is also unsustainable. T. S. Eliot in *Choruses from The Rock* rightly said,

The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries  
Brings us farther from God and nearer to the Dust (Eliot as cited  
in Mar 2006, 164).

The *veikau* in itself as a space is a pedagogy (a method and practice of teaching and learning). Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2006) argued that in Vugalei, such space is physical, socio-cultural, spiritual and abstract. She pointed out that for the people of the *vanua*, education has no school thus the *veikau* and wilderness is a pedagogy. It is so, as one is fully immersed and exposed to the sensitivity and vulnerabilities of the natural inter-connectedness of life pulses in the *veikau*. One hears sound of birds, insects and flow of water in the creek, cries of animals, smell the freshness in the air and scent of flowers, leaves and wood, touch and feel the natural forest floor carpet, taste the wild fruits like *kavika* (red mountain apple fruit) and *dawa* (*pometia pinnata*); and it is an engagement of all the five senses in learning with nature. This encounter opens inquisitiveness, creates a sense of awe, excites interest, draws one in communion with nature thus nurturing spirituality. Such pedagogical tool is embraced by the all-knowing Spirit, who takes Jesus into the *veikau* to be oriented through fasting and prayer for forty days and forty nights and only later to be tempted by the devil.

The *veikau* as a pedagogical tool for transformative encounter, is a significant concept in this article as it redefines how one is re-oriented into educational methodology, ways of learning and being. It is probably too critical to re-think and (un)learn some of the notions of learning and knowing acquired through the western system. Puamau in advising Pacific educational systems stressed that they had to make sure that their educational systems “are firmly grounded in their own epistemologies, cultural values and languages, while taking on the best of what the regional and global experiences have to offer” (2007, 5). This is so crucial when our Pacific communities have been hijacked by western systems and philosophy of education which Ruperake Petaia vividly describes in his poem *Kidnapped* (as cited in Vaai 2017, 230). Similar experiences have been highlighted in other contexts such as McCoy (2014) who shares an exploration of the cultural, health, and spiritual impact of the Australian missionary enterprise on Aboriginal men, particularly the experiences of a young boy leaving his home to attend a residential school for the first time and be separated from his father. Margaret Craven (1967) describes in her novel, *I Heard the Owl Call my Name*, how Christianity through its educational initiatives negatively impacted the lives of the young people of the Tsawataineuk Tribe at Kingcome village,

British Columbia. It brings an indigenous experience in North America. She carefully describes the uneasiness in the elders of Kingcome village when old Peter, the carver said:

It is always so when the young come back from school. My people are proud of them, and resent them. They come from a far country. They speak English all the time, and forget the words of Kwakwaka. They are ashamed to dip their food in the oil of the oolachon which we call gleena. They say to their parents, "Don't do it that way. The white man does it this way." They do not remember the myths, and the meaning of the totems. They want to choose their own wives and husbands (1967, 49-50).

The educated children are ashamed of their culture, they have forgotten their language, they dislike their food and leave their village to live in Vancouver. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1965) shares in his novel, *The River Between*, the African experiences of colonialism and the arrival of Christianity within the Kenyan community, how they are torn between their tradition and the Christian practices; with devastating impact on the people and their culture.

With these experiences shared, Bob Jickling of Lakehead University, Canada, editor of the book *Wild Pedagogies* highlights in the book the need "... to re-examine relationships with places, and landscapes, nature, more-than-human-beings, and the wild. This then, requires rethinking the concepts of wilderness, wildness and freedom" (Jickling 2018, 2). This is significant for the Fijian educational policy makers in addressing the long-standing educational gap that the successive Fijian government over the past decades strives to conquer.<sup>9</sup> The text probably is urging us to go "wild" in terms of pedagogy and approaches that is contextual and culturally friendly. The Spirit reverses all our pedagogical tools that are currently 'domineering, constraining and domesticating.' We are literally being locked into the so-called mainstream "... dominant versions of education that are enacted in powerful ways and that bend outcomes towards a human-centered and unecological *status quo*" (Jickling 2018, 6). Let us look into the text to experience the face-to-face encounter in the *veikau*.

### **The Veikau Theological Pedagogy Exposes the 'Stone-turning' Culture**

This is demonstrated in the gospel of Matthew 4:1-11. The dominating voice

of the devil enters the *veikau* school to be part of the pedagogy in Jesus' journey. The devil pointed at the stones which are part the *veikau* web-of-life and wild pedagogical tools, to be turned into bread; knowing fully well that Jesus has been through the *veikau* processing mill of "nill by mouth" for the last forty days. This draws our attention towards the "stone-turning" culture that is invading our organic Pacific islands like a tsunami through the development model that is powered by the 'one truth ideology' (Vaai 2015). The 'stone-turning' culture is camouflaged in the name of 'development' which Ravuvu, in his book, while describing the historical evolution of the "new dependence, the reduction in self-sufficiency and self- respect," (1988, ix) aptly titled it; *Development or Dependence*. And 'dependence' indeed has crushed our uniqueness as a people, stripping off our self-respect and dignity. Such stripping emerges as a direct consequence of the 'stone-turning' culture where indigenous population prefers all that is modern and of the west which includes language, architecture, food, fashion, systems, philosophy, development models; over and above our own.

Now, during the Lent period, believers and followers of Christ are called to the practice of fasting or "nill by mouth" in our land of abundance but unfortunately with the highest rate of Non- Communicable Diseases (NCD) in the world. According to the Pacific Island Food Revolution<sup>10</sup>, the Pacific is in a 'health crisis' with 75% of Pacific deaths NCD related. How can we possibly do the practice of fasting in our abundance? Why is abundance in our rich *veikau*, allowing escalation of NCDs as a leading cause of death and disability? Somehow, we live and breathe in our wild pedagogy, our natural organic food, our *teitei* (garden), the Pacific wild diet; and it is in here- within the *veikau*, that we can reverse NCD; yet we die with all remedies around us. This is accurately captured in the Fijian idiom: "*Tu na inima, ka luvu na waqa*" (The bailer was there but the boat sank); which means that the solution (to a problem) was at hand, but nobody thought of it. However, recently, the Pacific Island Food Revolution, which is an advocacy TV program airing the inaugural competition involving the Kingdom of Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa, show cases our locally grown food. This is hoped to wage war against the stronger marketing propaganda of processed food with cheap accessibility targeting our children and youth. This is typical 'upside-down' thinking (Huffer and Qalo 2004) of our people in reference to food choices which is skillfully summed-up very well in a few stanzas of Sia Figiel's poem titled, *No Ordinary Dawn*:

The latest SUV  
Last seen at a corporate fast  
Food joint  
Far away from the antiquated stones of  
The umu<sup>11</sup>  
Lining up in the drive-through  
Ordering Big Macs  
And soda  
And heart attacks  
And strokes  
And diabetes (2017, 274).

Just a few lines of this poem, correctly portrays the ‘stone-turning’ culture that has pervaded our socio-cultural behaviour and attitudes, blinded by the west’s frameworks of development; ‘extravagant’ lifestyles, improved living ‘standards’, economic ‘growth’, and better GPD. These are goals within the ‘stone-turning’ industry that Jesus is lured to embrace, however, Jesus replied; “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (NIV). Jesus directly speaks to the never ceasing demands of consumerism and globalisation’s obsession to conquer for more ‘bread’ through the extractive industry and the ‘stone-turning’ culture. This ‘culture’ has not only widened the gap between the rich and the poor, but also marginalizes by pushing people to the edges of society, undermined human dignity and rights, silenced the voices of resource owners, monopolises market, manipulates policies, and contributes immensely to environmental degradation and pollution.

All these issues arise as pursuits into the ‘stone-turning’ projects are accelerated without and/ or neglect of the ‘word’ that comes from the ‘mouth’ of God’s process and spirituality. David Mar stated that “[t]he glorious capitalist triumph of the past century affirms the market; the market anoints the self; the self replaces the Word” (Mar 2006, 151). Such ‘word’ and ‘mouth of God’, I am arguing here, is wired within the *veikau* and present in the sacredness of the web-of-life in creation. Psalm 19:3 affirms that the *veikau* is without speech, without language, without voice; but their sound and ‘word’ goes forth to the end of the world. This is dignified in humankind’s relational encounter with another in dialogue and *talanoa* with the *veikau*. The ‘Word’ being incarnated into our communities and its *veikau* should cause one to revere and respect all people as well as their surroundings and building networks of solidarity in hu-



man communities with the whole cosmos. This then takes us to the sacredness of the Earth.

## The Veikau as a Temple

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, but the devil had him on the highest point of the temple (v.5), another wild pedagogy. The devil persuades him to jump but Jesus was oriented by the Spirit in the wild pedagogy that allows him to establish deeper relationship with the earth, *soso*<sup>12</sup> (mud) and *veikau*. Wild pedagogy advocates for a ground-hugging and mud living people whose temples are built on the mud-bricks of humility. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians<sup>13</sup> affirms that their body is the temple of the Spirit and such a temple originates from the mud which is foundation of the *veikau*. Vaai's *Tino Theology* is thought provoking as it likened the body as an island and as such within the Pacific epistemology, has "multiple realities, such as a body of land (landscape), body of water (seascape), body of people (community of persons)" (2017, 224). According to W. E. Vine, the *soma* or body is "the instrument of life," (Vine 1984, 72) and such an instrument is intimately connected and rooted in the *veikau* and through their humble interactions produces life in balance and harmony. The humility in creation is profoundly expressed in the Psalm 19: 1-4:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament  
showeth His handiwork. Day upon day uttereth speech, and  
night upon night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor lan-  
guage where their voice is not heard. Their sound has gone forth  
through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In  
them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun (KJ21).

Thus, the temple is 'inbuilt' in the *veikau* with its interconnectedness with human-kind forces rethinking of our theologies and spirituality practices. The *veikau* with its web of life, do not have 'speech nor language' but mysteriously their 'sound' and 'word' go forth 'to the end of the world'. I recall in 2002, during my first year of ministerial training and formation at Davuilevu Theological College,<sup>14</sup> the late Talatala Tuikilakila Waqairatu, as Principal, led a spiritual practice that impacted and rekindled my relational life with the Earth. The college community assembled, he spoke to all of creation and addressed the trees, grass, birds, insects and the soil; to seek their forgiveness, explains the purpose and beg their consent for the disturbance of the earth to make way for a drive-way

and a new residential home for a college lecturer. This reverence for the whole cosmos is synonymous with practices in other indigenous communities. Margaret Craven also shares a Native American tradition of where mothers speaking to the trees as if to a person, seeking permission to remove her bark to prepare blankets for her children in winter. From a girl's memory, Craven quoted:

I went with my mother to strip the bark from the young cedar tree and I remember that she spoke to the tree. She said, "Forgive me because I seek your dress. I will not leave you naked," and she told the tree what she would make from the bark – a blanket, and a pillow for her baby's head (Craven 1967, 75-76).

A similar event is narrated by my younger brother, Samisoni, who is gifted with the knowledge of traditional medicines using herbs and vines from the *veikau*. Such gifts of traditional wisdom and knowledge is gifted to him by our family elders from both, our paternal and maternal links. He shares a moment when he goes out to scrape the bark of a wild lemon tree, he kneels before it, explains what he will do and the purpose of the activity, seeks her permission, begs her to load all her therapeutic powers of healing in the collected 'body' and begs her forgiveness for hurting her. Such a gift renders miracle healing to his patient.

The *veikau* pedagogy led by the Spirit allows one to be organic and authentic in his/her spirituality but not as a show on the temple-tops. There are diverse expressions of spirituality that we are exposed to; from solitary desert monk, the practice of meditation, the high or low church traditions, the mainline to contemporary worshippers and mega-churches with televised crusades. Framings of some identified spiritualities are organized using the neo-liberal economic system riding on the waves of globalisation. There is an increasing 'show' in the media outlets of the 'temple-top' Christianity and spirituality. This is vividly described in the book *Winds of Change* by Manfred Ernst (1994, 280ff) who analyses the changing religion-scape in the Pacific and suggesting there is a close correlation between the rising numbers of new religious groups with the expansion of capitalism particularly from North America. However, the changing spirituality context in the Pacific now shifts the blame on to the mainline churches who are also as guilty as the new religious groups in the promotion of capitalistic ways of knowing and being. The basic example is that most mainline churches have lost touch with the very poor members who are

struggling to live life. Philip D. Wingeier-Rayo affirms this by quoting Harvey Cox's *Fire from Heaven* who claimed that some scholars of Pentecostalism in Latin America have gone to "characterize Pentecostalism as a religion that identifies with the needs of the poor" (Wingeier-Rayo 2011, 9). It is also noted that mainline churches have attracted mainly the middle-class members. The innovations in sophisticated technologies such as TV, mobile networks, internet services and social media, greatly facilitates such spirituality. It invokes tendency to boast about healing in the name of 'testimony', it incites pride in the 'healers' for the sake of 'witnessing' and spreads arrogance in denominations in the name of 'evangelism' and 'saving souls.' Josep M. Soler quoted a saying of a "venerated" "spiritual mother," *Theodora*, whom he claimed "... was in touch with Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria" (1989, 33). Theodora is a theologian, who through her experience and knowledge of the human heart claims that humility is "... the most important of ascetic practices" (Solar 1989, 33). She shared an incident where anchorite asked the demons whether fasting made them flee.

"We neither eat nor drink," they answered. "Is it vigils?" They answered, "We don't sleep." "Is it being apart from the world?" "We live in the desert." "By what power do you leave, then?" And they said, "Nothing can overcome us except *humility*." (Solar 1989, 33).

Theodora has powerfully rendered insights as part of the *veikau* approach/school where Jesus has learned as part of the theological pedagogical processes, the values such as humility and relationality. It is a story of how humankind has to search and "find spiritual meaning and purpose of life within nature" (Egri 1997, 408). Indigenous communities in the Pacific and elsewhere share this common spirituality of reverence for the land, ocean and the whole cosmos as inhabited by the divine. Tuwere (2002) in illustrating this in the Fijian context, looks at the Fijian word for god, *kalou*. Tuwere explains that *Lou* (second syllable) is usually used to describe a yam garden when young leaves covered the soil and spread all around the garden making the gardener filled with joy, saying: *Sa lou na were* (garden)! When this is proclaimed, it means "that God is Creator and source of all life" (Tuwere 2002, 59). Such a theology and practices have been part of our ancestor's spirituality similar to the patriotic call: *Noqu Kalou! Noqu Vanua!* (My God! My Land!) The devil boasts about the temple built by humankind, but Jesus declares not to put the Lord God into the test, as

Immanuel now dwells in the *vanua*. It includes community of persons, *veikau*, relationships, and the whole web of life. Early Christian mystics affirm the mystical intimacy of humankind, nature and the divine through their writings from ‘a *vanua* philosophy’:

Everything in nature,  
the sum total of heaven and of earth,  
becomes a temple and an alter  
for the service of God.  
(Hildegard of Bingen as cited in Fox 1994, 306; and cited in Egri  
1997, 416).

This gives a view of a holistic cosmos in which God is portrayed as compassionate parent and the ‘the earth was holy’ and ‘there was unity in body and soul’ (Fox 1994 as cited in Egri 1997, 416). In similar tone, the temple which Jesus claims; “My Father’s house is a house of prayer”, draws humankind closer to God in the *vanua* as dwelling abode of the divine with the desire to carry the practice of prayer as “*kai veikau*” in all that we do, we will do it prayerfully. It is in the *vanua*, and where-ever one is located, is a given temple; thus, advocating the wild pedagogy in re-orienting our lives to be living prayer temples. It also incites an attitude of care and compassion for the *vanua* with its web-of-life.

### **Veikau Pedagogy demands Transformation at the Mountain-top**

In v.8 Jesus is taken to a very high mountain and showed all the kingdoms of the world and its splendor. The ‘Word’ who was there is the beginning and initiated creativity, allowed the participation of darkness, of deep and of waters; speaks light and order. The ‘very high mountain’ allows one to possess the eagle’s eye-view where small and unsophisticated things in life and community are taken for granted. The views and voices of the marginalized, the outcasts, the unemployed, the widows and orphans are inaudible and ignored. Tuivaga (1988, 1 as cited in Tuwere) provides an example saying, “women in Fijian society are seen but not heard despite their contribution to the family’s welfare and economy” (2002,111). This is heightened when manual workers are replaced by technology and newly innovated machines in the name of efficiency and productivity and small businesses are bullied by the transnationals. It is created by the ‘top-down’ philosophy and attitude that ‘smallness’ does not matter, but bigger sizes dictate terms of transactions. Such transactions work towards meet-

ing the meta-purpose of ‘a very high mountain’ or the ‘empire’. The face-to-face encounter on top of this ‘very high mountain’, one realizes the snub use of *Kai Colo* or *Kai Veikau*. In its snub usage, the devil is said to be ‘*Kai Colo*’, such a label is given to people who display great curiosity or even awe and admiration of or in new objects and ideas (Ravuvu 1968). The devil displays an inordinate curiosity and awe of “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; but it did not impress the Life-giving ‘word’ as the author and the ‘very word’ of Genesis 1:1 and Psalm 24: 1-2. It is unfortunate that the kingdoms of the world and their splendor advocate for the sustainability of empires through the neo-liberal economic system that is power and wealth hungry but has no real relationship with nor reverence for the Earth and her life-supporting connections.

The mountain-top approach is entrenching itself within Fiji’s socio-economic, religious and political system and may be so in other Pacific island countries. The promotion of the Green and Blue Economy, though they may carry noble intent but they are still shaped by the Eurocentric philosophy of growth and shaped by the neoliberal model that gives rich multi-national corporations the whole of the pie and to the grassroots communities only the crumbs. The two economic models push the grassroots communities to the margin and end up losing in the long-run. Even in Fiji, the promotion of the ‘Fiji made brand’ may sound excellent in terms of its domestic economic benefits but it is abusive of cheap labour and exploitative of the Earth’s life sources. It comes at a higher cost. Resource stewards are not compensated well, their livelihood destroyed, and wealth is locked in the hands of the few powerful rich. This is a sad reality, while Fiji takes center stage in international forums on Climate Change such as chairing the 2017 COP23 Meeting in Bonn, Germany, it continues to allow destruction of environment through license granted to extractive industries. John Pobee aptly describes it well in his book *Towards an African Theology* that “[t]he careless and irresponsible use of creation (*veikau*/wilderness) can only be regarded as assault on God” (1979, 19). Thus, the mountain-top approach that is sponsored by the imperial worldview has to be understood “as an assault on God” project where such ‘conscientization’ can invite transformation.

While mountain top approach serves the elite through accumulation of wealth at the top, Jesus demonstrates the practice of alms giving. The natural law of gravity dictates this. John Wesley once said: “Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” The wild pedagogy at the mountain peak urges us to relearn the practice of alms giving as we are in a privilege position to share



and serve. Mountain-top position is not static but fluid. The duration of one's position and status are determined by socio-cultural, political, economic and health factors. It is when one is elevated to such a status, that one is called to the responsibility to advance leadership and justice. Jesus declares that no man can serve two masters, thus it's a call to awakening spirituality and the practice of worship through standing in solidarity with the 'small'. The mountain-top theological encounter through the *veikau* pedagogy allows authentic reflection to see, to think and act, realizing the natural law of *vanua* takes its course and that the law of gravity is not imprisoned at the peak. All that is initiated at the mountain-top, have to be allowed to roll and flow naturally down-stream while at the same time, the peak continues to be openly receptive to the voices and echoes from the valley. This is the ways of knowing and being rooted in the *veikau* theological pedagogy that facilitates transformative encounter.

## Conclusion

To conclude, *Kai veikau* approach or the wild pedagogy, at its core, "is about reimagining and enacting alternative relationships" (Jickling 2018, 2). It is critically evaluating our current educational, theological pedagogies and practices and asking tough questions about our life's connection to the *veikau*. Thomas Berry expresses the urgent need of our modern societies to find a "new story", or to rediscover the "old stories" that had been forgotten, distorted or marginalized within the Western societies' 'dominant narratives', to take us to the future.

This universe itself, but especially the planet Earth, needs to be experienced as the primary mode of divine presence, just as it is the primary educator, primary healer, primary commercial establishment and primary lawgiver for all that exists within the life community. The basic spirituality communicated by the natural world can also be considered as normative for further ecological age (Barry 1988, 120 as cited in Egri 1997,408).

This is our greatest challenge. We might just relook in to our *veikau*/ wilderness and wildness, to encounter, to experience, to learn; they might hold keys to unlock the multi-layered and interconnected issues we are facing today.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Fijian is used in this paper to refer to the first people of the land or the indigenous group and more importantly their language. Although the 2013 Constitution of Fiji declares that all ethnicity is now called 'Fijians', *iTaukei* refers specifically to the indigenous Fijian people in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> *Tauvu* is the relational belief that they share common ancestral spirits (*vu*).

<sup>3</sup> Culturally relevant pedagogy is advocated by scholars to improve the educational gap that demarcates the whites from other migrants' academic under-performance in exams in school.

<sup>4</sup> The direct quotation in Matthew 4:1 "*Sa qai kauti Jisu cake na Yalo Tabu ki na veikau, ...*" ("Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness ...")

<sup>5</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa calls this the invasion of the island-minds

<sup>6</sup> *Valagi* is a Fijian interpretive expression to describe Europeans or the white people who visit the islands; *va* (four/or from) and *lagi* (heavens) thus they are said to be from faraway lands or literally believed to be from the 'other side of heaven', deemed advanced and civilized (also see Vaai 2017).

<sup>7</sup> The Kai Veikau brand website: [www.mensdressfashion.com/fashion/kai-veikau](http://www.mensdressfashion.com/fashion/kai-veikau) provides a wide variety of men's wear with the unique *veikau* designs which is gaining popularity in men's fashion wear industry.

<sup>8</sup> They have a web page: [www.kava-world.com/producers/kai-veikau/kava](http://www.kava-world.com/producers/kai-veikau/kava) with a Facebook page to promote their brand name.

<sup>9</sup> Educational gap is an important issue of discussion for many decades now and numerous scholars have highlighted the gap that exists between the high achievement of other ethnicities compared to under-achievement of the indigenous Fijians. Scholars such as Baba (1984), Ravuvu (1988), Tavola (1991) Nabobo- Baba (2006) have all been highlighting this issue.

<sup>10</sup> Pacific Islands Food Revolution (PIFR), a communication development project, is spearheading change in the region in the promotion of local healthy food choices in the Pacific. PIFR uses the power of reality TV, radio, and social media to change people's eating behaviour. PIFR was developed by celebrity chef Robert Oliver with the hope that the "Revolution will activate local cuisine knowledge and turn a mirror on the Pa-

cific itself that reveals that eating fresh, local, indigenous foods is the answer to good health” (www.pacificislandfoodrevolution.com).

<sup>11</sup> *Umu* is a Samoan name for the Fijian *lovo*, earth oven.

<sup>12</sup> *Soso* is a Fijian word for mud and messy ground. It also denotes the coming together of a community to *talanoa*, critique, reflect and act for the wellbeing of all.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19-20

<sup>14</sup> A ministerial training formation institution for the Methodist Church in Fiji, established in 1909.

## References

Craven, Margaret. 1967. *I Heard the Owl Call my Name*. London: Picador.

Egri, Carolyn P. 1997. “Spiritual Connections with the Natural Environment: Pathways for Global Change”. *Organization and Environment*. Special Issue: The Organization Dimensions of Global Environmental Change. Vol.10./No.4: 407-431. Accessed on 20 March 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26161559>

Ernst, Manfred. 1994. *The Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands*. Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches.

Gatty, Ronald. 2009. *Fijian-English Dictionary with notes on Fijian Culture and Natural History*. Suva: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.

Huffer, E. and Qalo, R. 2004. “Have we been thinking upside-down? The contemporary emergence of Pacific theoretical thought”. *The Contemporary Pacific*. 16, 87-116.

Hull, John M. 2001. *In the Beginning there was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversation with the Bible*. London: SCM Press.

Jickling, Bob (eds). 2018. *Wild Pedagogies*. Palgrave Studies in Education Futures. Accessed on 18 September 2019. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90177-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90177-3_1)

Kai Veikau Brand. 2020. Accessed on 30 March 2020. [www.pacificislandfoodrevolution.com](http://www.pacificislandfoodrevolution.com)

- Kai Veikau Kava. 2020. Accessed on 10 April 2020. [www.kava-world.com/producers/kai-veikau/kava](http://www.kava-world.com/producers/kai-veikau/kava)
- Kiki, Gwaiaweng. 2017. "A Relational Hermeneutical Approach to Theological Education in a Pacific Context". In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mind-set and the Pacific Itiulagi*, edited by Upolu Luma Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.
- Mar, David K. 2006. "Destructive Creation: The Covenantal Crisis of Capitalist Society". *Theology Today* 63: 145-149.
- McCoy, Brian F. 2014. "Men, Masculinity, and Missionaries: Exploring the Cultural, Health, and Spiritual Impact of the Australian Missionary Enterprise on Aboriginal Men". In *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific*. Edited by Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nabobo-Baba, Unaisi. 2006. *Knowing and Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Ngugi, James Thiongo. 1965. *The River Between*. Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers.
- Pacific Island Food Revolution. 2020. Accessed on 2 March 2020. [www.pacificandfoodrevolution.com](http://www.pacificandfoodrevolution.com)
- Pobee, John S. 1979. *Towards an African Theology*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon.
- Puamau, Priscilla. 2007. "Teacher Education at the crossroads: which path should we take?" In *Pacific Voices: Teacher Education on the Move*. Edited by Priscilla Puamau. Suva: The Pride Project, Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific.
- Ravuvu, Asesela Drekeivalu. 1988. *Development or Dependence: The Pattern of Change in a Fijian Village*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Soler, Josep M. 1989. "The Desert Mothers and Spiritual Maternity". *Theology Digest*. Vol.36/No.1. Spring: 31-35.

Thomson, Basil. 1968. *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall.

Tuwere, Ilaitia S. 2002. *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and Auckland: College of St John the Evangelist.

Vaai, Upolu Lumā and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (eds). 2017. *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

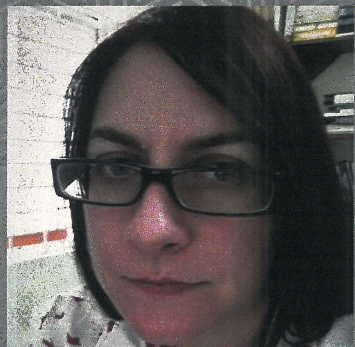
Vaai, Upolu Lumā. 2015. "A Theology of Talalasi: Challenging the 'One Truth' Ideology of the Empire". *The Pacific Journal of Theology*. 54:1-19.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2017. "Tino Theology". In *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*. Edited by Upolu Luma Vaai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger and William White Jr. 1984. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Wingeier-Rayo, Philip D. 2011. *Where are the Poor? A Comparison of the Ecclesial Base Communities & Pentecostalism – A Case Study in Cuernavaca, Mexico*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.





### **Dr Kathryn Imray**

*Kathryn Imray, PhD, PhD, is a Hebrew Bible specialist with interests in love, death, and beauty, womanist, feminist, and Queer hermeneutics, and biblical philosophies. In 2019 she was a Keshet fellow through the Aleph Alliance for Jewish Renewal, and recently graduated with a second doctorate in creative writing.*

## ***‘Kill all the boys ... let the girls live’***

### **Murder, Midian, and Mosaic leadership in Numbers 31**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The biblical book Bemidbar/Numbers, a collection of ‘travel itineraries and census lists, lists of personal names and lists of instructions for worship, reports of military battles and accounts of legal disputes’ (Olsen 1996, 2), can be viewed as a loose weave of material designed to move the people from Sinai to the edge of the land. There are many well known passages in the collection, the sotah ritual (Numbers 5), Miriam’s skin ailment (Numbers 12), spying out and rebellion at the edge of the land (Numbers 13–14), Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16), the Document of Balaam (Numbers 22–24), and the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27).

The story found in Numbers 31 is not so well



known. It recounts Yhwh's command to Moses to 'Avenge (נָקַם נִקְמָת) the Israelite people on the Midianites' (v. 2), and Moses' subsequent command to the Israelites to 'wreak the Lord's vengeance' (לָתֵת נִקְמַת־יְהוָה) on Midian (v. 3). Moses sends twelve thousand people against Midian, 'as the Lord commanded Moses' (כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה; v. 7), and they slay every male. They kill the kings of Midian and set fire to all its cities and camps, kill Balaam, seize their cattle and wealth, and take the women and their children captive (vv. 8-10). When לָלַחֵם, 'the booty', is brought to Moses and Eleazar the priest, Moses grows angry (וַיִּקְצַף מֹשֶׁה) at the military leaders for sparing the Midianite women, who, he says, 'handed over' (לְמַסֵּר) the Israelites to follow Balaam and thereby die of plague (vv. 11-16).<sup>1</sup> The chapter ends with an inventory of the spoils of war, and instructions on its division and ritual purification, and for the ritual purification of the army (vv. 19-54).

Prior to this inventorying, however, Moses instructs the military leaders (vv. 17–18): *הַיָּדַעַת אִישׁ לְמִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הָרָגוּ. וְכָל הַטֶּף בְּנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הַחִיּוּ לָכֶם.* (17–18) *Now slay every male among the children, and kill every woman who has known a man, the lying down of a male; but all the children among the women who have not known the lying down of a male, let them live, for yourselves.*

32,000 Midianites survive the slaughter, the ‘human souls from the women’ (נַפְשֵׁי אִדָּם מִן־הַנְּשִׁים) young enough to be certifiable virgins (v. 35), and these יְלָדִים, ‘children’, are divided among the campaign participants, the community as a whole, Eleazar the priest, and the Levites (vv. 40–41, 46–47).<sup>2</sup> Here the abduction and rape ‘of prepubescent girls directed by Moses raises male sexual violence to the level of divine commandment’ (Gafney 2017, 130).

As with countless other biblical passages, Numbers 31 is predicated upon the division of ingroups and outgroups.<sup>3</sup> In this, 'Moses' last commission from God' (Wildavsky 2005, 86), the Midianite people are an 'Other not deserving of pity' (Niditch 1993, 45) to Moses and to the people who follow him. The difficulties of indigenous and other colonised peoples reading the bible against their own interest is well attested. The numerous further intersections which can be made between this passage and Pacific contexts will be evident, and should not be limited to the explicit connections made below. Reading with Moses in this passage requires accepting the annihilation of Midian as, at best, collateral damage, and rape and 'outgroup derogation' as divinely sanctioned, even holy.

This article disengages from that reading counterintuitively by throwing a spotlight on Moses. Taken against the broader backdrop of his leadership and his relationship with Midianite people, Numbers 31 evidently condemns Moses' actions, and cautions against the type of leadership which places the interests of any cultural or religious group over those of an other.

## Midian and Moses

The term 'Midianite' was likely used of different groups during different times and places, but archaeological evidence suggests Midian lay in the general region of Moab (Levine 2000, 473; Dor 2013, 150). In biblical genealogy, Midian is related to Israel through Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:1–2; also 1 Chron 1:32–33). It is odd therefore to consider Moses wanting them dead, for not only is the entire people kin to his people, the land of Midian provides a safe-haven for him after he flees Egypt, is the origin of his prophetic call, and gives him his family.

Zipporah, Moses' first wife, is a Midianite woman and the only woman to perform a circumcision (Ex 4:24–26). Moses' father-in-law, alternately called Reuel, Jethro, and Hobab (Ex 2:18; 18:1; Judg 4:11), is respectfully titled כהן מדין, 'a priest of Midian' (Ex 2:16; 3:1; 18:1), and the foundation of the Israelite legal and administrative system is attributed to him, when he encourages an overwhelmed Moses to delegate tasks to others (Ex 18:13–26). Exodus 18 emphasises the familial connection between Moses and his Midianite relations. Jethro is called Moses' חתן, 'father-in-law', 13 times in 27 verses (vv. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 [x2], 14, 15, 17, 24, 27). Zipporah is named Moses' wife three times (vv. 2, 5, 6), and their children are called 'her sons' (בניה; vv. 3, 6) as well as 'his son[s]' (בני; v.5).<sup>4</sup> Their children, Gershom and Eliezer, are named symbolically for Moses' experiences. גרשם, Gershom, 'stranger there', is a reminder that Moses, and, through tradition, all Jewish people, 'have been a stranger in a foreign land' (Ex 2:21; 18:3), while אליעזר, Eliezer, literally 'my God is help', is said to mean 'the God of my father is my help, and he delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh' (Ex 18:4).

Jethro is not the only non-Hebrew religious professional who finds positive treatment in Torah. The prophet Balaam is linked to both Moab and Midian in Numbers 22–24, himself hailing from Pethor by the river (Num 22:5), or Aram Naharaim (Deut 23:4), upper Mesopotamia. The elders of Moab and of Midi-

an, under instruction from Balak, king of Moab, request Balaam to curse the Israelite people, who famously blesses them instead under the advice of Yhwh Elohim (22:18). The figures of Jethro and Balaam evidence that divine revelation can come through paths not limited to the ingroup, just as Zipporah's ritual of circumcision shows that ritual innovation can come through '(even foreign) women', surely a lesson to be learned by some Pacific institutions who continue to view religious leaders who are women as an abhorrence. Balaam's characterisation in Numbers is however complex, and he is 'both a true prophet (Numbers 22–24) and an instigator of apostasy (31:15–16) at the same time' (Olsen 1996, 176–177). Despite not appearing in Numbers 25, in Num 31:15–16 Balaam is linked to this chapter, wherein the Israelites engage in prohibited social interaction with Moabite and Midianite women, accepting invitations to eat food from their altar and bowing to their God or Gods (אלהיהן), acts which are met with violence and possibly with plague (25:2, 6, 8).<sup>5</sup>

Numbers 25 and 31 reflects an ingroup/outgroup dichotomy which portrays 'alien women as sensuous and evil enticers, embodiments of the wrong way, the foreign way' of idolatry and anti-Yahwism (Niditch 1993, 45). Such an attitude is prevalent (not only) in colonialism. Europeans have consistently feminised foreign lands and sexualised non-European women, projecting onto them 'forbidden sexual desires and fears' (McClintock in Vaka'uta 2013, 182).<sup>6</sup> This is infamously evident in European Primitivist art, exemplified in Paul Gauguin's 1892 *Spirit of the Dead Watching (Manao tupapau)*, in which Gauguin painted his naked wife Teha'amana, local flowers and a Tahitian post carving, and invoked the tupapau, the spirit of the dead, to represent the geographically and culturally exotic (Staszak 2004, 354).<sup>7</sup> Colonialism has dehumanised indigenous women globally (Sullivan 2018, 398). Under colonialism, Australian Indigenous women have historically been framed as "a racialised erotic, figured as sexual deviants, the living embodiment of promiscuity and disgust" (Sullivan 2018, 401). Representing a group as sexually abject often serves to justify violence against them (Drake 2013, 99). In Numbers 25, the people, men and women inclusive, are said 'to whore' (לזנות) with Moabite women, a term which can mean 'sex-for-money, worship of other deities, or intermarriage with non- Israelite peoples' (Gafney 2017, 137; 2013, 193). The punishment for this initially falls on Israelites rather than on Moabite women, but Numbers 25 slips between Moabites and Midianites, and the account, and the punishment, slides onto Kozbi bat Tzur, daughter of one of the leaders of Midian, and through her to the Midianite people as a whole (Num 25:6, 15,

16–18).<sup>8</sup> Post-biblical interpretation has salivated over the sexual suggestiveness of the story, but what exactly they are doing in the קבה, ‘tent’, is unclear (Frymer-Kensky 2002, 220–222).<sup>9</sup> Numbers 25 could describe the violent disruption of a wedding celebration (so Dor 2013, 144; Rees 2013, 168; Gafney 2017, 154–155) between the son of an Israelite tribal chief and a Midianite princess. If so, Kozbi and her husband are executed for doing only what Moses has done twice already.

How then to understand the pro- and anti-Midianite passages, and Moses’ inconsistent attitude toward Midian and its inhabitants?<sup>10</sup> Critical approaches have suggested different authorship representing different ideologies. With respect to Moses, the pro- and anti-Midian passages could preserve material ‘by pro-Moses and anti-Moses priestly groups who claim descent by Moses and Aaron respectively’ (Niditch 1993, 45). Source critical analysis of the Midian texts tends to suggest that anti-Midianite texts are later than texts in which Midianites are positively represented. Exodus 18 is attributed to non-Priestly sources, while Numbers 31, with its concern for priests, Levites, and the sanctuary, is without exception attributed to the Priestly source (P), though not necessarily the earliest level of P (Noth 1968, 146; Budd 1984, 333; Niditch 1993, 48; Olsen 1996, 3; van Seters 1999, 22). Scholars can therefore resolve the tension or contradictions in the texts by splitting the differences across sources. John T. Noble, for instance, writes in a somewhat circular argument that while Numbers 31 and Judges 6–8 are negative toward Midianites, the tradition connecting Moses and Yhwh to the Midianite priest Jethro must be quite old, as ‘a late historiographer would be unlikely to associate YHWH with peoples and places outside of Israel’ (Noble 2016, 132).

Although some P texts are xenophobic, it is not so simple as to claim that, over time, the free and easy Hebrew community, a community of mixed multitudes and porous boundaries, developed into a legalistic and rigidly separatist community. Such a claim repeats the anti-Jewish ideology in which Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis is soaked (Silberman 1982, 75ff). The claim that post-exilic Judaism is completely opposed to intermarriage also does not accurately reflect the polyvalent attitudes toward pluralism and intermarriage in Priestly and other post-exilic texts (Dor 2013, 146). The command to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev 19:34) is Priestly. The post-exilic authors of Ruth mess with in-group/outgroup divisions through the figure of the Moabite Ruth, grandmother to the messiah, David, though of course this could go multiple ways.<sup>11</sup> Even

the infamous setting aside of ‘foreign’ wives in Ezra 9–10 is not cut and dried, since the command to practise ‘ethnic exclusivity’ was not implemented, and Shecaniah’s 10:1–2 ‘admission of guilt’ for marrying one of the people of the land can be read as a resistance speech ‘making a fool’ out of Ezra (Dor 2013, 146; Vaka’uta 2009, 4).

Nevertheless, in this text, Midian, and Midianite women in particular, are the objects of Moses’ genocidal imagination, and there is something significant in having Moses embody this hatred. Yonina Dor (2013, 153, 157) argues for this as an ‘extreme ideological response to the narrative of Moses and Zipporah’s marriage’, a midrash ‘warning about the bitter results of mixed marriages’. Philip Budd claims Numbers 31 sets up a Mosaic model of interaction with Midian excluding the possibility of any relationship (Budd 1984, 333). Budd concludes that a war with Midian must be set during Moses’ life to ensure Israel’s attitude is ‘one of sustained and ruthless hostility’ (1984, 334). Budd reads with Moses in assuming the text presents ruthless hostility as model for inter-tribal relations. Such a reading might appeal to those looking for a biblical basis to exclude or to otherwise mistreat people of other faiths or ethnicities, but this is not the only way to understand the significance of Moses’ actions, or the Mosaic model of leadership.

### **Moses, Israel’s Pharaoh**

There are few if any wholly positive portrayals of leadership in the Tanakh, and this includes Moses. Though there are biblical passages which gush over Moses’ humility and wisdom (e.g. Num 12:3), there are other passages in which Moses’ character falls under a shadow. Despite this, the scholarship tends to latch on to the positive verses, either reading the remainder of the story through them, or ignoring Moses’ shadow altogether.<sup>12</sup> Read as a literary whole, there is no doubt Moses changes across the span of his works. The Moses who fears to speak in public (Ex 4:10) is cut from a different cloth than the Moses who steadily orates Deuteronomy, and the Moses who names his Midianite son to remind him of his own narrow escape from genocide is surely of a different character than the Moses who calls for the death of all Midianites (except the little girls). Read synchronically, Moses’ characterisation from Exodus to Numbers is nuanced and complex. It is not unfailingly positive, and it is even, as in Numbers 31, clearly negative.

Moses' instructions to the Israelites in Numbers 31 might not reflect the divine command to *נָקָם נִקְמָה*, 'avenge the vengeance', in v. 2. Though v. 2 instructs Israel to avenge themselves, in the next verse, Moses significantly embellishes the command, attributing the vengeance to Yhwh, and extrapolating from *נָקָם נִקְמָה* explicit instructions for battle, an incongruence sneakily taken up by the narrator in v. 7. There is no instruction to seize the spoils of war (vv. 9–12), and the fighting men appear to be acting under their own guidance in these verses. In vv. 15–18, however, Moses adds to *נָקָם* yet *נִקְמָה* another layer of interpretation, this time taking it to specify the slaughter of all women except those marked out for rape. This is not the only time Moses is seen to embellish an instruction. Such is the case in Exodus 19 (Frymer-Kensky 2006, 169). Though God instructs Moses that the people are to prepare themselves for three days (vv. 10–11), Moses instructs the people, 'do not go near a woman' (v.15). In Numbers 25, also, though Moses is told to execute the Israelite leaders, he then changes the divine command, telling the tribal leaders to kill their fellows.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that Moses in Numbers 31 delivers instructions which run counter to the divine intention.<sup>14</sup> It is also possible that Moses' murderous interpretation of the divine instruction is what was intended by *נָקָם נִקְמָה*, in which case the negative characterisation in Numbers 31 must encompass both Moses and God.

As seen above, the Midianites come to be the focus of Moses' genocidal will through the story recounted in Numbers 25. This one act is enough to overpower the many positive interactions Moses has had with people who are Midianite.<sup>15</sup> As Aaron Wildavsky (2005, 20) writes, 'Moses was most fierce against other peoples: they entangle Israel in their own customs, blurring the distinctiveness of Israelite beliefs so as to weaken the Hebrews' special relationship to the Lord'. It is out of concern for religious and cultural distinction that Moses commits these horrific crimes. "Don't mix disparate categories" is not far from "don't mix with the Midianites", Wildavsky interprets, and 'cultural confusion could turn Israelites into Egyptians' (Wildavsky 2005, 89, 90). It is not enough for Moses to maintain the distinction of his people through 'social distancing' measures; he must ensure it by erasing the people of Midian entirely. Moses' actions invoke the spectre of every genocide in modern history, from the Armenian to the Bangladesh genocides, the Australian genocide, with its countless massacres of Aboriginal people and the Stolen Generations, to the Shoah. The desire to 'perfect' a place by excluding the other is all around us even now, from the continued presence of ethnonationalism, driven by fear of loss of land, in Fiji, to the resurfacing of white supremacy globally, culminating in such acts of



terrorism as the massacre in the Tree of Life—Or L'Simcha synagogue in Pittsburgh on Shabbat morning, October 27, 2018, and the massacres in Masjid An-nur and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch during Salat al-Jumu'ah, March 15, 2019.

Moses' desire to erase Midian does not come as a surprise. Not only does he elsewhere exhibit the same temper he displays here, his openness to religious and cultural others, suggested by his intermarriage and good relations with his in-laws, is not always what it seems. Moses' flair up of temper in Num 31:14 is in keeping with his striking the rock to bring forth water, one reason for his death outside the land (Num 20:10, 12). The events of Numbers 31 are foreshadowed also by an earlier murder. After Moses sees an Egyptian striking his 'kinsman', literally 'brother' (אָח), he first looks 'this way and that way' to confirm no one will see, then kills the Egyptian and hides him in the sand (Ex 2:12).<sup>16</sup> The murders of Exodus 2 and Numbers 31 both arise from Moses' concern for threats to his people, but one is the immediate and real threat of bodily harm to a brother, and the other is a perceived threat to ethnic and religious distinction.

Throughout, Moses finds value in the religious or cultural other only where it benefits either himself or his ingroup. The others Moses encounters are not ends in themselves, but means to his ends. In Num 10:29-32, Moses asks Hobab, here his brother-in-law, contra Judg 4:11, to remain with the Israelites as they travel to the land.<sup>17</sup> 'If you go with us', Moses says, 'this good which Yhwh does for us, we will do for you' (v. 32). The offer is not made for no reason: 'for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be our eyes' (v. 31). Likewise, Reuel/Jethro provides a home and employment for Moses when he is on the lam (Ex 2:20-21; 3:1), offers career advice to Moses which benefits the community (Ex 18:13-26), celebrates Israelite victories, and praises the God Moses worships (Ex 18:9-12). Jethro rejoices for the liberated Israelites, offers a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, which Aaron and all the elders come to eat, and exclaims, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה, 'now I know that Yhwh is greater than all the Gods' (vv. 10-12). While it is tempting to excise the latter as a pious gloss, it is also possible to read it as Jethro's attempt to cross the divide between himself and the other.<sup>18</sup> Jethro does not, as far as we can know, meet Moses where he is for the political or economic gain of his people. He moves to meet Moses, using language that an Israelite might use (Childs 1974, 329), for no other reason than the relationship itself, and in doing so unites the two peoples in celebration and alliance. Moses, in contrast, never makes the attempt, and his openness to

Midianite people falls away quickly once he and they are no longer positively interdependent, and he is living among his preferred ingroup.

The contextual connections to be made are obvious, and I will note only one of a possible many. Though there are innumerable Pacific leaders who consider their way to be the only way, their God the Only God, there are leaders who do, in theory, support interfaith work. The Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma for example have as their tenth pillar, ‘inter-church and inter-faith relationships’ (MCIF 2020, n.p.).<sup>19</sup> Often the language is present, but the praxis is absent. Leaders might support ‘deep ecumenism’ at a global level, or in the abstract, but not enact it, whether because of inability, fear, or hypocrisy, at a community level.<sup>20</sup> Jethro is a model for deep ecumenism as he brings together word and deed. One might also reason that interfaith dialogue is necessary if we are to achieve common goals, such as the ‘Nation Building’ goal of the MCIF’s tenth pillar. If people must be coerced into interfaith work through appeal to political, economic, educational, or environmental ends, so be it. Yet it would be wise to remember that Jethro appears to bring together word and authentic deed toward no other end than relationship in community.

In the Mosaic myth, public and private coalesce, and Moses’ command against the Midianites has implications for his own family. Jethro returned to his land in Ex 18:27, and, if not the religious leader accompanying Midian into battle, to be killed in the field, would have been murdered in the battle’s aftermath. In Num 10:30, Moses’ brother-in-law Hobab returns to his own land, and though Jethro might have been too old for battle, his son Hobab would have been the right age for fighting. Zipporah’s six sisters, who came out to the well with her on the evening she met her future husband (Ex 2:16), would have been among the women taken captive to Moses and Eleazar in the camp by the Jordan, all of them executed under Moses’ command (Num 31:12).

The question must be asked, then, did Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer survive this ethnic cleansing?<sup>21</sup> Zipporah is named only three times in Torah (Ex 2:21; 4:25; 18:2), and there is some confusion over who precisely is the wife mentioned in Num 12:1.<sup>22</sup> Whether this is Zipporah or a second, different woman, neither woman appears again after Numbers 12. Either Zipporah or Zipporah and her sister-wife both disappear into the book, as do the children, Gershom and Eliezer, though the Chronicler’s post-exilic midrash on the history of Israel does mention their descendants in passing (1 Chron 23:15, 17). The textual

silence on the family's response to Moses' hatred calls for something to be spoken. Was Zipporah still among the Israelites, or had she gone to her people again? Were Eliezer and Gershom with her, or with their father, and what did they think of his command to kill (them and) their extended family? How could they continue in relationship with these people who wanted them dead?

The mind turns here to another murderous father and the midrash which grew up around a different textual silence. After Abraham is stopped at the final moment from making a burnt offering of Isaac, he returns to his servants (Gen 22:19). Isaac is not with him, and though both Isaac and Ishmael bury their father in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 25:9), after the Akedah, Abraham and Isaac never speak again. In a midrash around Sarah's silence in Genesis 22 and her death in 23:1, when Isaac tells his mother what Abraham almost achieved, she shrieks six times and drops dead (Vayikra Rabbah 20:2). Let us, instead, let Zipporah live. Perhaps she, Gershom, and Eliezer, hearing of Moses' and the Israelites' intentions, fled the camp to warn Jethro, Hobab, the six sisters, and anyone else who would listen, and perhaps the Midianites who raid Israel's crops and cattle in Judg 6:3 their righteous descendants.

Finally, another passage from Exodus is key for Moses' characterisation in Numbers 31. Moses is born despite a genocidal edict issued by Pharaoh to midwives Puah and Shiphrah (Ex 1:16): 'if it is a son, kill him' (והמתן אותו), but 'if it is a daughter, she will live' (היא חיה). In Num 31:17, 18 Moses commands the military leaders, 'slay every male among the children' (הרגו כל-זכר בטרף), and every girl, 'let [her] live' (והיה . . . כל הטף בנשים). The terms used are different (son/male among the children; מות/הרג; daughter/children among the women; she will live/you will let live), but no person, having heard the story of Moses' birth, would fail to hear its echo here. Through Moses' command, we are primed to view him as the villain of the piece, and the actions against Midian unjust, with the Midianite people positioned as the Hebrews in Egypt. Given that Moses rose from those circumstances to lead his people to freedom, we could read Numbers 31 as the first instalment of the origin story of a Midianite hero.

In *Moses as Political Leader*, Wildavsky argues that Moses has to learn leadership 'on the job', and initially learns what to do, and what not to do, observing Pharaoh. During this time Moses learns, for instance, that a leader is to identify with his people, rather than separating himself from them, and for the Israelites to be separate, culturally, religiously, and politically (Wildavsky 2005, 82, 86–

88; see also Gendi 2012, 59). Pharaoh thought he was wise but was really a fool (Gendi 2012, 61-65), and Moses evidently learns from the foolishness of ordering the death of the boy children but letting the girls live, for in this Pharaoh ensured, even without the heroic Puah and Shiphrah, the Hebrews would, gradually, again increase in numbers, and do so among their own people. Though Moses replicates Pharaoh's command to let the girls live, in this iteration it takes on an even more sinister slant with the addition of two syllables, לָכֶם, 'for yourselves' (Num 31:18). This 'for yourselves' denotes the little girls being drawn inside Israelite boundaries, their cultural and religious identities erased, and 'rape and forced impregnation' (Gafney 2017, 159).

Let us first speak to the rape of children in the Pacific before turning to genocidal rape and child abduction as a technique of empire. Historical statistics compiled by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) show that of the 153 child abuse cases seen by their counsellors from 1993 to May 1998, 103 cases involved sexual abuse (FWCC 2020). A 2015 UNICEF study found that, of the women interviewed, 16 percent of Fijian women, 19 percent of Kiribati women, 37 percent of Solomon Island women, and 30 percent of Vanuatu women, had experienced sexual abuse before the age of fifteen (UNICEF 2015, 8). The Vanuatu study showed, of these women, 14 percent experienced the sexual abuse between six and 10 years of age, and 74 percent experienced the sexual abuse between 11 and 14 years of age (UNICEF 2015, 9).

Genocidal rape is deployed for several purposes: to cause such terror that people will flee; to act as a humiliating sign of victory over a defeated people; to torture; to desensitise those who do it; to bolster the population of the genocidal ethnicity; and to break the biological and social bonds of the victim group (Smith 2013, 89–91). In these last senses, genocidal rape includes the paradoxical purpose of 'killing off . . . peoples by producing more of them' (Allen 1996, xiii), but it is also committed upon children and the elderly (Smith 2013, 94). Rape has been an element on the ongoing genocide of indigenous peoples by Europeans. In testimony of the colonisation of Tasmania, white settlers killed Aboriginal men and took Aboriginal women captive, chaining them and raping them as they wished (Smith 2013, 83).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of 'mixed-race', the Stolen Generations, were forcibly removed from their families by the Australian Government. These abductions continued even into the 1970s, more than twenty years

after Article II of the Genocide Convention, to which Australia was a signatory, defined genocide to include the act of ‘forcibly transferring children of the group to another group’ (United Nations, General Assembly 1948, 1). Aboriginal Australian children remain six times more likely to be removed from their families for child welfare reasons than non-Aboriginal children, with Aboriginal families still being seen by the government as ‘the “problem”’, and Aboriginal children continuing ‘to be seen as potentially “saveable” if they can be separated from the “dysfunctional” or “culturally deprived” environments of their families and communities’ (Link-Up [NSW] cited in Australian Human Rights Commission 2012, n.p.).

There is no doubt then that the story of the abduction and rape of the girl children by the Israelites in Numbers 31 is one tool in a Mosaic campaign of genocide against the Midianite people. Exploited over a period of years, used concurrently as slaves and sex slaves, these children would have ‘offset population losses due to war and disease’ (Smith 2013, 94) while also erasing Midian. Moses learns from the foolishness of Pharaoh, and the kindness of his adopted mother, Pharaoh’s daughter, both of whom allow Hebrew children to be raised by their own people. Moses fears a cultural confusion which could turn Israelites into Midianites, but he is counting on cultural confusion to turn these Midianite girls, or at least their children, into Israelites. Like Pharaoh, Moses wants to retain the cultural distinction of the Israelites, and in his concern to fend off the perceived threat of cultural confusion at any cost, Moses is transformed into Pharaoh, only worse.

## Conclusion

This article addressed the characterisation of Moses in Numbers 31, and responded to the problem of how Torah can present such conflictual Moseses, the Moses of ‘interfaith’ and ‘interpartnering’, and the Moses of closed borders, the liberator Moses and the genocidal Moses. The differences are often split across sources, with an argument made for movement from openness to xenophobia. This response does not take into account the multivalent perspectives on community mixing recorded in the bible, even in the post-exilic period. By reading Moses’ leadership in Numbers 31 against the broader background of his story, we can trace the development of his attitudes toward the religious and cultural other, attitudes which problematise his status in tradition as a leader to emulate.

Several contextual intersections have been presented throughout, and these in no way exhaust textual possibilities. This reading has picked out the ability of women to be instigators of ritual renewal, of ‘people-of-the-outgroup’ to be valued and respected contributors to the culture and religion of the ingroup, and of the value in pursuing interfaith dialogue not for some albeit laudable goal, but for the relationship alone. The reading found traces of Numbers 31 in the genocides of modern history, and in the politics of race both near and far away. It has addressed the sexual and gendered elements of the story through colonial portrayals of indigenous women, and the use of sexual violence in colonisation. The rape of the Midianite children too demands we speak to the use of rape in genocide, and to the sexual abuse of children in our region.

Contrary to the claims of some readers, Moses’ call to kill the Midianites in Numbers 31 is wholly relevant to his character, and it is fruitful, indeed necessary, to ask how Moses becomes this dictator. Moses moves from being a leader so concerned with the wellbeing of his people he will murder one person, to a leader who will murder an entire people in revenge for a perceived past threat. The tipping point in Moses’ relationship with Midian comes in Numbers 25, and the presumed threat posed to his people’s cultural or religious distinction. This is ‘let my people go’ (Ex 7:26) taken to its grotesque extreme.

Moses’ genocide replicates Pharaoh’s, but with the addition of the abduction rapes it is better planned and more successful. Though Moses ‘has learned well’ from Pharaoh (Gafney 2017, 157), he has learned the wrong lessons. The names of his children become reminders not to pursue justice, but to pursue cultural or religious distinction through injustice. In Numbers 31 Moses indulges the worst of his character, and like Darth Vader turning to the dark side commits an atrocity from which he cannot return. His actions defile everyone who takes part,<sup>23</sup> including God, who never again asks Moses to do anything, except die (Num 31:2; Deut 34:4). Moses might or might not be following the divine command, but the people can choose to follow him or not. When in Numbers 25 Moses tells the people to kill their fellow Israelites, perhaps recognising it as an unjust command, they do not obey. In contrast, in Numbers 31 the command to kill the Midianites is met with utter obedience, and some creative improvisation, and, once again, it is necessary to ask why, when the supreme leader tells them to murder within their ingroup, they can say no, but when the leader tells them to murder the outgroup, some of them prefer to say yes.



Why did the biblical authors tell this story? There is a reason the story is embodied in Moses, but it is not to create an ideal legal model for all future interactions, nor to offer an ideological midrash on the evils of mixed marriage. Numbers 31 does not express how it should be; instead, it is a criticism and a condemnation of how it can be. Numbers 31 is a midrash on what can happen when an isolationist, hyper-identified person prone to relational violence takes leadership within a thirsty population. Moses represents, as with many Tanakhic leaders, a caution against all that can go wrong. Numbers 31 becomes a condemnation of the type of leadership that claims divine sanction for prejudice, and which views the other only as either a means to advance or a threat to the ingroup, and asks if this can ever result in anything but atrocity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In Torah, God, Moses, and a Pharaoh are קצף (Gen 40:2; 41:10; Ex 16:20; Lev 10:6, 16; Num 16:22; 31:14; Deut 1:34; 9:7, 8, 19, 22). מִסֵּר, 'induced' (NJPS), is hapax, occurring only here and Num 31:5. The meaning of the phrase is uncertain, although punning is evident, with the tribes 'מִסֵּר' their troops for battle, and the Midianite women 'מִסֵּר' the Israelites to crimes against God. See Gafney (2017, 150–151) on שָׁלַל, 'booty'.

<sup>2</sup> The word טף almost always refers to prepubescent children (Levine 2000, 456).

<sup>3</sup> These are terms from social psychology, designating one's own group, and other groups (Levy, West, Ramirez, and Pachankis 2004, 43). People can exhibit a preference for their ingroup members (ingroup bias), and prejudice against the outgroup, or outgroup derogation, especially in times of competition for scarce resources, whether actual or perceived (Slocum and Lee 2004, 86; Clark and Tate 2008, 110; Brown 2010, 287). The exploration of 'self' and 'other' is prevalent in Numbers (Levine 2000, 463).

<sup>4</sup> There is no reason to consider Zipporah and Moses divorced. The LXX translates 18:2's אַחֲרֵי שְׁלוּחֶיהָ, 'after she was sent', to mean 'after her dismissal' (μετὰ πῶς ἀφῆκεν αὐτὴν), perhaps reading 18:2 in light of Deut 24:1, where וּשְׁלַחָהּ מִבֵּיתוֹ is a term for divorce. Ex 18:2 lacks Deut 24:1's מִבֵּיתוֹ, 'from his house' (see Filler 2018). It is also nonsensical to think that Jethro would 'return' a divorced woman to her former husband.

<sup>5</sup> In this article I abandon the God/god division of translation which legitimises one God over all other Gods.

<sup>6</sup> So too have Christians attributed a deviant and abominable sexuality to both Jewish men and women, and problematically gendered the entire people and our cultures (e.g. Drake 2013).

<sup>7</sup> In this article critiquing Primitivism and the Other, Jean-Francois Staszak repeatedly refers to the indigenous people of Tahiti as Maori rather than Maohi. Nāsili Vaka’uta (2013, 180–181) uses not *Spirit of the Dead Watching* (*Manao tupapau*) but *Te Aa No Areois Aka* (*The Seed Of Areoi*) and images of Tongan women from the Goddefroy album to make this same point.

<sup>8</sup> Probably not her real name, as ‘Kozbi’ is from the root כזב, meaning to lie or deceive (Niditch 1993, 35).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to consider what the (traditionally, male) commentators get out of pondering Kozbi’s murder.

<sup>10</sup> There are yet other passages concerning Midian, and the following is not an exhaustive summary. It is Midianite traders who pull Joseph out of the pit and sell him either to Ishmaelites or to Potiphar (Gen 37:28,36). Esau’s descendent, the Edomite king Hadad, strikes Midian in the field of Moab (Gen 36:35). This same Edomite king, now Solomon’s enemy, travels from Midian on his way to sanctuary in Egypt (1 Kgs 11:18). In Josh 13:21, Moses is said to have defeated the Midianite chiefs and put Balaam to the sword. In Judges 6–8, Midian is the agent of divine judgment, raiding crops and animals until Gideon’s war brings forty quiet years (6:1, 4; 8:28). A great historical battle with Midian seems to have become a cultural myth (Ps 83:10; Isa 9:3, 10:26).

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Sharp (2014, 239, 247) convincingly argues that Ruth is characterised as a hustling Moabite widow, the ‘manipulative progenitor of the wily David’.

<sup>12</sup> In a key commentary on Numbers, though Moses ‘lapses’ are fatal for him, ‘he is otherwise the unfailing leader’ (Milgrom 1990, xlii). Though the Priestly tradition ‘refutes the legendary superhuman status accorded the figure of Moses . . . it never denies that he was the greatest of men’ (Milgrom 1990, xlii). The recurrent theme of Moses’ failures proving only how very great he is, is found also in Coats’ *The Moses Tradition* (1993), in a chapter on Moses the failed hero as model for ministry. In this study also, though Coats devotes an entire chapter to ‘Moses in Midian’, there is no reference to Numbers 25 or 31 anywhere in the monograph. In Coats’ other Moses monograph, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, one does find reference to both Numbers 25 and 31.

Coats notes that in the actions against Midian, Moses ‘remains the leader of the people and the spokesman for God’, but is nonetheless ‘extraneous’ to the proceedings, and as the passages are about Midian and not about Moses, they ‘are not a matter of relevance for the Moses tradition’ (Coats 1988, 55, 147, 56). Coats retains a pristine image of Moses by sidestepping the difficult passages, refusing to consider Numbers 25 and 31 might be pertinent to Moses’ characterisation.

<sup>13</sup> The divine command in 25:4 is difficult to interpret, but could refer to some form of ritualistic execution or sacrifice. Whatever it is, it is not what Moses relays in v. 5, and in any case, neither command is carried out. The only other deaths in the chapter, apart from Kozbi and her husband, are the 24,000 Israelites killed by a plague ‘for appreciating the ways of the Moabites’ (Vaka’uta 2013, 185).

<sup>14</sup> For more on this see Brown (2015) and Grossman (2007), who argue that the arrangement of laws and narratives from Numbers 25 to 31 highlights a concern with divine command and human initiative. Brown (2015, 77–78) further argues for Judges 21 as the closest parallel to Numbers 31, a comparison unflattering for Moses.

<sup>15</sup> In this Torah replicates the 1961 findings of Sherif and Sherif (cited in Brown 2010, 145), who showed that one instance of competitive intergroup contact between two previously peaceful groups, even when group members knew each other personally, was enough to turn the groups against each other, and even violent.

<sup>16</sup> This is, by definition, premeditated murder, and incurs blood guilt (Ex 4:24–26).

<sup>17</sup> In Judg 4:11, Hobab is Moses’ father-in-law, not his brother-in-law.

<sup>18</sup> Historically speaking it could be a cultural or ethnic rather than a religious divide, for it is possible that the Midianite and Israelite peoples held much the same religious beliefs, whether or not some Israelites always viewed it that way (see Dor 2013, 148–149). Perhaps Numbers 25 and 31 are an example of Freud’s narcissism of small differences.

<sup>19</sup> With thanks to Geraldine Wiliame for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>20</sup> The ecumenism which moves beyond religious boundaries has been called interfaith or interreligious dialogue, and more recently, ‘deep ecumenism’. Medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, ‘Divinity is an underground river that no one can stop and no one can dam up’ (cited in ALEPH 2020, n.p.). Following this, Matthew Fox coined the term ‘deep ecumenism’, stating, ‘we would make a grave mistake if we confused [any one well] with the flowing waters of the underground river. Many wells, one river. That is Deep Ecumenism’ (cited in ALEPH 2020, n.p.).

<sup>21</sup> Gafney (2017, 158) assumes, possibly based on 1 Chron 23:15, 17, Gershom and Eliezer “‘counted” as Israelites’.

<sup>22</sup> Numbers 12:1 refers to Moses’ Cushite wife. This could be a second wife, or it could, based on the parallelism between Chushan and Midian in Hab 3:7, be reference to Zipporah, here without her name, thereby emphasising her otherness (Dor 2013, 155). It is unclear whether Miriam and Aaron criticise Moses because he has taken a second wife,

or because he ‘married out’. Whatever the case, Miriam (but not Aaron) is afflicted with מצרעת, a skin ailment, and put out of the camp for seven days in punishment for lashon hara, suggesting there is no fault to be found in Moses’ actions. That Miriam is turned white for casting aspersions on a black woman should not go unnoted. For an extensive study on Cush and related terms see Sadler (2005, esp. 146–152).

<sup>23</sup> Niditch argues that Numbers 31, as with other texts (e.g. Deut 21:10), is attempting to determine the parameters of a just or holy war (Niditch 1993, 49). Even so, she says, Numbers 31 ‘expresses genuine ambivalence’, for the participants have to cleanse themselves before returning to the community, suggesting there is something in their actions which defiles. ‘The cause is holy, the war is ritualized, but the killing defiles’ (Niditch 1993, 53). My own position is that the killing defiles because the war is unholy (whether divinely commanded or not).

## References

ALEPH. 2020. “Deep Ecumenism”. *ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal*. Retrieved from [aleph.org/projects/deep-ecumenism](http://aleph.org/projects/deep-ecumenism).

Allen, Beverley. 1996. *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Australian Human Rights Commission. 2012. ‘Bringing them home Community Guide: 2007 Update.’ Australian Human Rights Commission, 14 December, 2012. Retrieved from [humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/bringing-them-home-community-guide-2007-update?ga=2.213467095.213770762.1590391021-932653954.1590391021](http://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/bringing-them-home-community-guide-2007-update?ga=2.213467095.213770762.1590391021-932653954.1590391021).

Brown, Ken. 2015. “Vengeance and Vindication in Numbers 31”. *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 134/1: 65–84.

Brown, Rupert. 2010. *Prejudice: Its Social Psychology*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Budd, Philip J. 1984. *Numbers*. Waco: Word Books.

Childs, Brevard S. 1974. *The Book of Exodus*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.



Clark, Khaya D. and Tate, Chuck. 2008. 'Measuring Racial Prejudice in a Multiracial World: New Methods and New Constructs.' In *The Psychology of Modern Prejudice*. Edited by Melanie A. Morrison and Todd G. Morrison. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Coats, George W. 1988. *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*. JSOTSS 57. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *The Moses Tradition*. JSOTSS 161. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Dor, Yonina. 2013. "From the Well in Midian to the Ba'al of Peor: Attitudes to the Marriage of Israelite Men and Midianite Women". In *Leviticus and Numbers: Texts @ Contexts*. Edited by Athalya Brenner and Archie Chi Chung Lee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Drake, Susanna. 2013. *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. 2020. "Preventing Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Pacific Children". Retrieved from [www.fijiwomen.com/flare/child-abuse/preventing-commercial-sexual-exploitation-of-pacific-children/](http://www.fijiwomen.com/flare/child-abuse/preventing-commercial-sexual-exploitation-of-pacific-children/).

Filler, Elad. 2018. "Moses and the Kushite Woman: Classic Interpretations and Philo's Allegory". TheTorah.com. Retrieved from [thetorah.com/article/moses-and-the-kushite-woman-classic-interpretations-and-philos-allegory](http://thetorah.com/article/moses-and-the-kushite-woman-classic-interpretations-and-philos-allegory).

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. 2002. *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*. New York: Schocken Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

Gafney, Wilda C. 2017. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Gafney, Wil. 2013. "A Queer Womanist Midrashic Reading of Numbers 25:1–

- 18". In *Leviticus and Numbers: Texts @ Contexts*. Edited by Athalya Brenner and Archie Chi Chung Lee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Gendi, Magdi S. 2012. "Pharaoh as a Character in Exodus 1–2: An Egyptian Perspective". In *Exodus and Deuteronomy: Texts @ Contexts*. Edited by Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Grossman, Jonathan. 2007. "Divine Command and Human Initiative: A Literary View on Numbers 25–31". *Biblical Interpretation* 15: 54–79.
- Levine, Baruch A. 2000. *Numbers 21–36*. Anchor Bible 4A. New York: Doubleday.
- Levy, Sheri R., Tara L. West, Luisa F. Ramirez, and John E. Pachankis. 2004. "Racial and Ethnic Prejudice among Children". In *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination. Racism in America*. Volume 1. Edited by Jean Lau Chin. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Methodist Church in Fiji. 2020. "12 Pillars of the Church". Retrieved from [www.methodistfiji.org/12-pillars-of-the-methodist-church-in-fiji.html](http://www.methodistfiji.org/12-pillars-of-the-methodist-church-in-fiji.html).
- Milgrom, Jacob. 1990. *Numbers/במדבר*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Niditch, Susan. 1993. "War, Women, and Defilement in Numbers 31". *Semeia*. 61: 39–57.
- Noble, John T. 2016. *A Place for Hagar's Son: Ishmael as a Case Study in the Priestly Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Noth, Martin. 1968. *Numbers*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Olsen, Dennis T. 1996. *Numbers*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press.
- Rees, Anthony. 2013. "Numbers 25 and Beyond: Phineas and Other Detestable Practice(r)s". In *Leviticus and Numbers: Texts @ Contexts*. Edited by Athalya Brenner and Archie Chi Chung Lee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.



Sadler, Rodney. 2005. *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible*. JSOTSS 425. New York: T. & T. Clark.

Sharp, Carolyn J. 2014. "Feminist Queries for Ruth and Joshua: Complex Characterization, Gapping, and the Possibility of Dissent". *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*. 28/2: 229–252.

Silberman, Lou H. 1982. "Wellhausen and Judaism". *Semeia*. 25: 75–82.

Slocum, Frederick and Yueh-Ting Lee. 2004. "Racism, Racial Stereotypes, and American Politics". In *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination. Racism in America*. Volume 1. Edited by Jean Lau Chin. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Smith, Roger W. 2013. "Genocide and the Politics of Rape: Historical and psychological perspectives". In *Genocide Matters: Ongoing Issues and Emerging Perspectives*. Edited by Joyce Apsel and Ernesto Verdeja. Abingdon: Routledge.

Staszak, Jean-Francois. 2004. "Primitivism and the Other: History of Art and Cultural Geography". *Geo-Journal*. 60: 353–364.

Sullivan, Corrinne Tayce. 2018. "Indigenous Australian women's colonial sexual intimacies: Positioning indigenous women's agency". *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 20/4: 397–410.

UNICEF. 2015. *Harmful Connections: Examining the Relationship Between Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children in the South Pacific*. Suva: Author.

United Nations, General Assembly. 1948. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. 9 December, 1948. Retrieved from [www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimesDoc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimesDoc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf).

Vaka'uta, Nāsili. 2009. "Fooling Ezra: A Polynesian Reading of Ezra 10:2–4". Paper delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Conference, New Orleans. Retrieved from [www.academia.edu/488942/Fooling\\_Ezra](http://www.academia.edu/488942/Fooling_Ezra).

\_\_\_\_\_. 2013. "Indicting YHWH: Interpreting Numbers 25 in Oceania". In *Leviticus and Numbers: Texts @ Contexts*. Edited by Athalya Brenner and Archie Chi Chung Lee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

van Seters, John. 1999. *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Wildavsky, Aaron. 2005. *Moses as Political Leader*. Jerusalem; New York: Shalem Press.

---

## *Si'i le Tuā'oi*

### **Shifting Perceptions on Exodus 1:8-2:10 through a Samoan/Pasefika Reading**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Sii le tuaoi in Samoan literally means to shift (sii) the boundary (le tuaoi) commonly associated with land.<sup>1</sup> This practice in Samoa is generally perceived as offensive and, in extreme cases where there is no consensus, fatal. Since customary lands are inextricably connected to one's identity and livelihood, any kind of disregard for boundaries come with grave consequences. Sii le tuaoi, therefore, is not considered a polite phrase for Samoans, nor is it an act that is widely encouraged. Put bluntly, if the shifting of boundaries is not a mutual undertaking then it should be avoided entirely.

But sii le tuaoi need not be confined to physical



**Dr Faafetai Aiava**

*An ordained pastor  
of the Congregational  
Christian Church  
Samoa and Head of  
the Theology & Ethics  
Department at the PTC  
where he completed his  
doctorate. He and his  
wife Luse are currently  
residing in Fiji with  
their four adorable  
children.*



spaces nor perceived strictly as negative. This article aims to redefine *sii tuaoi* as connoting a life-affirming action as well. To that end, a caveat is in order. To say that shifting boundaries is necessary for life to flourish is not to assume that all boundaries must be shifted. While there are certainly life-suppressing borders that warrant shifting, there are also borders put in place to preserve life. As witnessed in the various global responses to the recent coronavirus pandemic, not all boundaries are ill-intended or require overhaul. This is why a meticulous scrutinising of social, political, religious and other essential boundaries is vital. Regrettably, such analysis would not be possible within the prescribed space as the emphasis will be on biblical characters. Nevertheless, *sii le tuaoi*, at its core, calls for a critical discernment of why and when shifting is appropriate.

The story in Exodus 1:8-2:10 was selected for a number of reasons but I will offer three. First, the female characters, often seen as marginal to the overall Moses/Exodus narrative,<sup>2</sup> are actually central to the liberation of the Israelites or better, its forerunners. Second, the overlapping frontiers of nationality in the story in addition to the underlying boundaries between life, death and a life not fully lived (slavery) bear important lessons regarding the way justice or, in this treatment, an unapologetic call for a full life, has been understood today. Third, the narrative offers inspiring examples of where boundary shifting is not just possible but necessary. To assist in this re-reading, I will engage some of the overlooked nuances of the word *tuaoi* with the intent to shift our usual perceptions of the story through a Samoan/Pasefika perspective. The reverse effect is equally desired. That is, for the story to challenge our worldviews and perceptions of what constitutes a full life.

### Unpacking ‘*Sii le Tuaoi*’ as a Pasefika Lens

The term Oceania and the attempt to redefine the Pacific as a ‘sea of islands,’ underpin the notion that *islanders* are not *landlocked* thinkers (See Epeli Hauofoa 1993).<sup>3</sup> In other words, seeing the Pacific through its landmasses or its remoteness does not fully capture a conscious footprint of Pasefika, let alone, self-image. Embedded in our knowledge systems (proverbs, myths, rituals and traditional wisdoms) are portrayals of life that are not dictated by land or its parameters. This is because the *moana* or *wansolwara* (ocean), rivers and water coasts are as much a part of land (*vanua*, *fanua*, *whenua*, *fonua*, *fenua*) as are people (See Tuwere 2002 and Vaai 2019). These ecological connections, fundamental to the Pacific worldview, are crucial because it is not the minute-

ness of the population count that ought to define us, nor is it the enormity of its seascapes (as implied in Oceania), but rather the interconnectedness of life in all of its multiplicity. As put concisely by Upolu Vaai,

[a]ll of life is an ‘assemblage of relationality’, meaning that it is structured according to relationality. The organisations, systems, social fabrics, land, ocean and people are all structured relationally [...] It is not a system per se. It is life. All of reality is constituted by relationality, by dynamic flows of relationships in an infinite multiplicity of becoming (2017, 26).

From this perspective, no island is an island. Rather, they are interconnected webs of relationship woven together by, and for, life and its sustenance.

Another apt description of islanders is “border peoples” (Davidson et al 2015, 15ff). That is, people strategically located in intermediary spaces for which the ocean functions more like a bridge between nations than a fence. For the island dweller, boundaries are seen as fluid because of its potential to connect. Fluidity in this sense does not mean that the uniqueness of each island is lost. To the contrary, it is within this multiplicity of life that makes *sii tuaoi* an enriching encounter. This is one of the drawbacks encountered when scholars prioritise the accuracy of traditional wisdom sayings as though they are land- or time-locked. It betrays our dynamic heritage or what Elizabeth DeLoughrey talks about in her book titled, *Roots and Routes* (2007) which discusses the fixed yet fluid histories throughout the Caribbean and the Pacific. As seen also in Samoa, even the most popular of *tala* (stories and proverbs) are understood to be diverse (*talalasi*) in meaning and reference (See Vaai 2015).

The same principle also applies to the word *tuaoi*. When divided, *tuaoi* can point to a particular space or to another person. With reference to space, a *tuaoi* points to an area ‘*tua o i*’ or ‘beyond here’ (Efi 2009, 158). This definition stresses the distinction between ‘here’ (‘*i*’ or emphatically, ‘*ii*’) and ‘beyond’ (‘*tua atu*’). In relation to a person, *tuaoi* translates as neighbour in the usual sense of the word (Pratt 1911). In both instances, the coexistence of mutual counterparts is evident. For example, here would not be possible if beyond were absent. Without the distinction, here would be everywhere and beyond becomes obsolete. Likewise, a neighbour cannot exist without a neighbourhood in the same way that a neighbourhood of the self would not be possible unless there is an-other.<sup>4</sup>

If, therefore, *tuaoi* implies a boundary of distinction and connection, then the act of *sii tuaoi* is not necessarily the intrusion of boundary but an invitation to relate.

What is meant here by invitation needs to be understood critically and not naively. This is because the invitation to relate connotes communion. That is, the mutual coming together of distinct parties to participate in a relationship founded on our deepest notions of respect and our Christian mandate to treat others—beyond the self—as oneself (Matt 7:12). Intrusion, on the other hand, refers to boundaries that are crossed or shifted out of selfish desire or any other self-serving motive. Whether or not these are acknowledged, the conflating of invitation into exploitation is outright intrusion. Today there are numerous breaches of boundary (including those not yet recognised as such) operating under the guise of economic development, good governance, international aid and the like. That topic, however, is for another day.

For the purpose of this article, I wanted to stress the point that although *sii tuaoi* can be inviting, it is not free from the manipulating grasp of those in power. In this light, I bring back the traditional perception or more specifically, the offensive dimension of *sii le tuaoi* for two reasons. Firstly, as with any act of reinterpretation, *sii le tuaoi* is a risky enterprise. If ‘here’ implies a comfort zone, the status quo, or what Spivak identifies as the systemic forces behind “worlding” (1985), then the proposal to shift ‘beyond’ the conventional can be met with hostility. Secondly, the practice of shifting boundaries is an act of resistance or defiance especially in contexts where boundaries are deeply entrenched. In colonial or postcolonial contexts, not excluding the academic, this subversive function of *sii tuaoi* is welcome. For self-reference, a prior reading of Exodus 1:8-2:10 is highly recommended.

### **Before the Exodus: The Making of Boundaries**

At the beginning of the selected text (v.8), we are told there is a change of administration where what was once a familiar bond turns into the reinforcing of a boundary. By the end of Genesis, there exists a clear distinction between the settlement of Joseph’s people and the people of Egypt yet no factions are noted. The new Pharaoh, we are told, did not know Joseph and had become uneasy about the growth of his people. But even if Joseph’s friendship with the former Pharaoh was not acknowledged, one would assume that Joseph’s role in devising the economic plan that saved Egypt during the famine would have



then been common knowledge (Gen 41:34-57). The book of Genesis also tells us that Joseph was no mere member of the Egyptian regime of the day. Rather, he had the authority to give directives bearing the royal seal (ie. the signet ring given to Joseph in Gen 41:42). Be that as it may, perhaps the new Pharaoh just ignored this history.

One of the hallmarks of friendships that go sour is selective memory. It is reminiscent of an infamous Samoan idiom that goes, ‘e uo uo foa,’ translated as ‘friend friend, head-lump.’ Despite its satire, the idiom warns about the way that severed friendships are only remembered through the injury. While the new Pharaoh might not have known Joseph on a personal level, the public record of Joseph’s contribution to Egypt’s accumulated wealth should have stood for something. This example not only illustrates how enemy lines are formed, but it also demonstrates how easily those in power can reform (deform?) public memory. As a result, the boundary that once distinguished the two diverse peoples living alongside one another was now a border of division.

Such borders, in conjunction with fear-mongering, are the key ingredients to a growing climate of mistrust. Notwithstanding the political reasons public fear is aroused today, the universal logic behind the ‘us versus them’ project is that the masses will remember the hero from the villain. The success of such efforts can be seen in the phrase “the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites” (Ex 1:12). Similar parallels can also be found in the way various governments and its citizens today have responded to immigration, border control and policies concerning minority groups.<sup>5</sup> When viewed side by side, there is nothing new or profound about the way that the Exodus story quickly escalates into one of exclusion and enslavement.

But the lines of division do not end there. In Exodus 3:10 there are clues of Egypt already having enemies, hence, the paranoid instruction: “let us deal shrewdly with them (Israelites), or they will increase and, in the event of war, join *our enemies* and fight against us and escape from the land” (emphasis mine). Here, it is unclear whether these enemies are external or internal. Since there is no evidence of political tensions during Joseph’s time in office or any mention of deaths occurring as a direct result of the famine, where could these ‘enemies’ have come from?

One theory would be to go back to the manner in which the Egyptian empire

attained its wealth, in particular, through the twenty per cent tax introduced by Joseph. From what we are told, the tax that was imposed before the famine was only on surplus grains. However, in the absence of any review, it appears that this tax had become permanent. To make matters worse, the centralisation of food resources during the famine left so many citizens with no other choice but to offer their livestock, lands as well as their labour in order to eat (See Genesis 47:18-24). This means that even before the Exodus, the precedent of indentured labour or slavery had already been set. If there were indeed countless farmers, landowners and their families living in the debt of the State, then perhaps these ‘enemies’ might actually be from within.

This might explain why Pharaoh’s suspicious gaze had turned inward. According to Roland Boer, “the process of differentiation has an internal component” (2013, 227). To paraphrase him, what began with the alienation of the Israelite population had continued in its discriminative path to those within. Exclusion, therefore, ceases to be an outside job but an inside one. Once exclusion begins, the inner circle (the ‘us’ group) will continue to tighten until there are more outside than in.

### **Deliberate Boundary Blurring: Shiphra and Puah (Midwives)**

Before I turn to other important characters in the story, I want to firstly define what I mean by boundary blurring and boundary crossing.<sup>6</sup> Boundary blurring, according to Richard Alba and Victor Nee, happens when the “social profile of a boundary” somewhat loses its definition or clarity (2003, 60). This can be due to overlaps happening so often and by so many on both sides that the social distinctions of a boundary become blurred. This is different from crossing a border which happens mainly at an individual level. To cross a border is to go over a line without changing it. The border is neither blurred nor affected. However, to deliberately blur a boundary means to disturb it or smudge it in both directions until the distinction is faded to the onlooker.

In a literary study conducted by Jewish scholars, Moshe Lavee and Shana Strauch-Schick, numerous insights are found regarding the nationalities of Shiphra and Puah. There is evidence congruent with the mainstream view that the midwives are of Hebrew descent as implied in their names. An alternative view suggests that the midwives are actually pseudonyms for Moses’ mother and sister, namely, Jochebed and Miriam (Lavee and Strauch-Schick 2015). This

view proposes that the names of the midwives correspond with the various attributes of a mother and sister. For instance, the midwife Shiphra is likened to Jochebed, as her name is the root word of ‘meshaperet’ which means ‘to take care.’ While Puah, whose name means ‘to coo, calm or soothe,’ is said to be a pseudonym for Miriam (2015).

If this evidence of the midwives being Hebrew is accurate, then why would Pharaoh entrust them with a task such as killing their own? Another theory contended that the midwives could have originated from Egypt but eventually converted. This is implied in other translations including the Septuagint which uses the lengthier phrase ‘midwives of the Hebrews’ instead of ‘Hebrew midwives’ (2015). If midwifery was a ‘health service’ provided across the board in Egypt, then it is possible that the two mentioned are Egyptian midwives working among the Hebrews in which case the lengthier translation would suffice.

The most convincing argument by Lavee and Strauch-Schick was derived from a midrash fragment found in the Cairo genizah (dated approximately 1000 CE). This fragment, also appended to their work with an English translation, contains a list titled “righteous gentile women” which includes Shiphra and Puah alongside Asenath (Joseph’s Egyptian wife), Pharaoh’s daughter, Tziporah (Moses’ Midianite wife), Rahab and Ruth (2015). Based on this evidence, both authors concur that the Egyptian identities of the midwives were likely suppressed by latter traditions, particularly in the Babylonian Talmud. Such traditions perpetuated the view that there is

...no place for liminal identities or blurring of boundaries when it comes to fearing God; one is either a Jew or gentile, with conversion the only bridge between them. Later tradition moves in one of two directions, but in each case making them unambiguously Jewish: it either casts the women as converts to Judaism or conflates them with the well-known Jewish figures, Miriam and Yocheved (sic) (2015).

But their (midwives) nationalities were not the only boundaries being blurred. In terms of their actions, no details are given regarding why any Egyptian would risk their own neck for Hebrew boys or how they unflinchingly deceived their leader and got away with it. The text states ‘the midwives feared God’ (1:17), which could affirm the ‘righteous gentile’ hypothesis, but their behaviour might

also indicate a breakdown in the relationship between these particular midwives and Pharaoh. Could they be indentured slaves or descendants of those that fell on rough times during the famine? Specifically, could these two fit the label of ‘enemies’ uttered by Pharaoh?<sup>7</sup>

An alternative explanation could be related to the midwife profession which is mainly concerned with the delivery of life. In Samoan a midwife is a faatosaga. The root word *tō* which translates as pregnant, to plant, or bring forth, implies that a faatosaga is a role that is deeply invested in the nurturing of life and its potential. In the prenatal stages, a faatosaga is crucial because she (usually a woman) is the traditional healer who not only offers therapeutic advice on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the mother but also carefully massages the safe passage of the unborn. A faatosaga, therefore, is not someone you meet on the day of labour. Rather, a faatosaga can be sought at the beginning phase when trying to conceive or soon after conception. Her services end when she is convinced that the mother and child are sound and healthy.<sup>8</sup>

By asking the midwives to end life prematurely, Pharaoh was not only committing sin, but he was also imposing on a boundary that a faatosaga, even the boundary-blurring type, dare not cross. To ask why the midwives “allowed the boys to live” (1:18), as Pharaoh does, is to ask a self-defeating question. This is because the permission or prohibition of life is neither the prerogative of the midwives nor Pharaoh for that matter.

### Pharaoh’s daughter

This leads to another interesting paradox in the story connecting the midwives and the unnamed daughter of Pharaoh. In Exodus 1, the midwives supposedly confess about Egyptian women being weak saying, “the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them” (1:19). The irony, if we accept the midwives to be Egyptian, is that their defiant actions and the actions of Pharaoh’s daughter in Exodus 2, tell us that Egyptian women are anything but weak. As we will explore later in the actions of the Hebrew women in the story, there is no such inequality of strength. The double-deception here is that Pharaoh might not be the only one being deceived. Perhaps the reader is too.

But before moving to Exodus 2, it is important to digress once more to the public decree handed down by Pharaoh in Exodus 1. After the failure of his first order

given to the midwives (1:16), Pharaoh expands his infanticide (of males) to be enforced by “all people” this time through drowning (1:22). Pharaoh’s public decree is significant because by now, his daughter should be aware that this child floating in the Nile had to be a Hebrew (2:6). Regardless, the Egyptian Princess not only chooses to let Moses live but she wants him to thrive as one of her own (implied in the act of naming him).

One can make the argument that Pharaoh’s daughter merely crossed the border without changing it since she hid Moses’ ethnicity anyway. However, the fact that she raised Moses as a son and not a slave, while also accepting the aid of Hebrew nurses, connotes a smudging of the border from both sides. Her secret becomes a shared one.<sup>9</sup> At this juncture, it is interesting to note how Pharaoh’s fear of male babies was possibly misplaced. As seen in the key characters surrounding the birth of Moses and the lead up to the liberation of the Israelites, it was the female characters that made it possible.

## **Shifting the Boundaries of Life and Death: Jochebed and Miriam**

### Jochebed the Failele (Nursing mother)

Now Exodus 2 tells us of all the preparations performed by Moses’ mother before setting him afloat in a river where male babies might have already drowned. We are also told that 3 months had gone by which is significant because a nursing mother or failele in Samoan, is believed to be the most susceptible to mental and physical illness including death. For this reason, a failele in Samoa is advised to refrain from any strenuous activity for an entire year to help with her recovery.<sup>10</sup> The failele in this story, however, was not afforded such luxury. Being a matter of life and death for her son, Jochebed springs into action paying little attention to her own marginal state of wellbeing.

For an island reader, this interstitial space at the boundary of two extremes can be an inviting one; a space where innovation and creativity are born. Aware of the imminent possibility of her own death at the one end (ie. through persecution or illness) and everything that life has to offer on the other; Jochebed chooses life for her son.<sup>11</sup> These possibilities, particularly, the possibility of death, resembles Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of death. For him, an inauthentic existence is characterised by those trying to evade death through denial or other means, instead of accepting their mortality. This evasion of the possibility of ‘not being,’

says Heidegger, compels a person to lead an inauthentic life (1962, 251-260). Instead of burrowing herself into the liminal options available, Jochebed fought for the life of her son and, in the process, embraced all of her possibilities. She did not settle for the rule or the prescribed border. If 'here' meant death or a life of slavery then the *tuaoi* had to be shifted 'beyond.'<sup>12</sup> If life for her son was to be a life of hiding, then blurring the line was not enough.

For her, there can be no substitute for a full life. No mere existence. No survival confused as life. Life is meant to be lived fully or one is to die trying. Although there are multiple reasons for her disdain, I put forth two from the perspective of *sii tuaoi*. First, similar to the midwives and Pharaoh's daughter, Jochebed refuses to simply let him die. At the same time, she wanted to do more than just let him live. This is because to let-die and let-live remains partial and restricted. It does not encompass the full possibilities of a person. Second, it was not the fear of death that she was pushing against—because we all die one day, rather it was the debilitating borders of a life not fully lived.

### Miriam

One of the underrated characters in this story is Miriam, who, like the midwives, travels back and forth between the various Egyptian and Hebrew dwellings. I was tempted to interpret her movements as boundary-crossing since she appears to cross boundaries without being noticed or disturbing the lines of division. But that would be a mistake. Using both her adolescence and gender to her advantage, Miriam plays the chameleon in the story, maintaining her camouflage while swiftly entering the various social spaces. Homi Bhabha likens this behaviour to mimicry, where colonised subjects engage in subtle practices that appear compliant with the culture of the coloniser without really accepting it (2004, 172).

It is likely that Bhabha would also identify Miriam, being the youngest within the narrative, as representing a hybrid generation with reference to his theory on Third Space. According to this theory, hybrid cultures are produced or reproduced within an ambivalent space between the coloniser (ie. Egyptians) and the colonised (ie. Hebrews) (2004, 54). While this view is certainly plausible with reference to Miriam's unrestrained access, I think her location is more relational than hybrid as she does not really seek to undermine or mimic the Egyptian culture but rather to connect with the Egyptian princess. Moreover, I



think the prevalent culture evident among the female characters of the story was a culture of life. This life-centeredness was why Miriam broke her silence as soon as the opportunity to relate presented itself. Fortunately, this resulted in her mother gaining access to the Egyptian palace and Moses receiving the best nutrition from his very own mother (Ex 2:7-8).

## **Challenges of Sii Tuaoi**

### To be subversive and prophetic

To be subversive like the women in the story is to be uncompromising in the pursuit of life. It is subversive because it goes against the grain of prevailing powers, disrupting its rule and dismantling its life-suppressing conventions. The reason it is uncompromising is because sii tuaoi also recognises boundaries that cannot be crossed, particularly, those that preserve life.

On that note, sii tuaoi is not for the faint hearted as the preservation of life means maintaining a prophetic voice and being prophetic can be very confronting. It involves interrupting the colonial narrative of ‘divide and conquer’ and pushing back against its infringing borders. Like the women in the text, the shifting of boundaries for the sake of life is both deliberate and unapologetic. The princess sought no kind of permission from her father, whereas the midwives went as far as lying to him. In both instances, there is no attempt or the slightest forethought of seeking approval. What makes it more profound was the way that both Hebrew and non-Hebrew, recognised that the permission to live (or let-live) is God’s domain. A similar parallel can be found in the story of the woman who was healed by touching the cloak of Jesus (Mark 5:21-43). She, like our Exodus women, did not seek pre-approval or even apologise for being hopeful for an abundant life.<sup>13</sup>

### Shifting in Solidarity and the Significance of Tuaoi

Standing in solidarity with ‘the other’ is comparable to shifting in solidarity. The major difference is that the former implies a stationary position while the latter connotes a dynamic location that requires ongoing adjustment and realignment. In the example above, it was unfamiliarity that turned neighbours (tuaoi) into enemies. This divide was further consolidated by Pharaoh’s unwillingness to relate or realign himself with Joseph’s people. This was not the case for

the diverse women or the prominent ‘border peoples’ in the story, whom, despite living behind enemy lines, found ways to shift the boundaries together. Their mutual concern for life and their openness to form a life-affirming albeit, unconventional community, epitomises how (neighbourly) love can only be achieved when it moves beyond the self.<sup>14</sup>

That said, moving beyond the self needs to go beyond humans too. As Pasefika communities, it is vital to maintain the multiplicity of life in our conceptions of tuaoi or neighbour. Neighbour, therefore, includes plants, trees, river, creatures and those organic entities formerly referred to in dominant discourse as non-living. This is not to be confused with environmental efforts geared more towards food security or some kind of human-centred charity. Rather, it should stem from a deep conviction that what we have in common with and not over a plant is life and life is to be cherished and valued with the utmost respect.

Of course, the commitment to shift in solidarity with the less fortunate comes with challenges. Even in neighbourhoods like our own, there are suppressive borders and other factors that trigger mistrust. One example is when relief funds or monetary grants are given only to be followed up with rules and conditions. Another is when acts of kindness turn out to be motivated by individual or corporate gain. Regardless, this should not deter the church from mobilising its efforts of being a failele (nurses/nurturers) to the needy. This is because to stand on the side of life is to stand in solidarity with the God of life. For the same reason, being a tuaoi or a ‘living embodiment of neighbour’ should be taken seriously. It was because of life, that an Egyptian midwife became an unlikely neighbour to a Hebrew mother. Even the Egyptian Princess could not ignore the cries of an infant born to the despised nation. Amidst a world plagued by hate crimes, police brutality and systemic discrimination, it is surprising how people forget that many of these boundaries are social constructions and they, like our perceptions of tuaoi, can be transformed.

### Sii Tuaoi for Life and Justice

Paying homage to the Fifty-fifth anniversary of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) and the inaugural launch of its Strategic Plan titled ‘Towards Excellence in Theological Education for Leadership for Justice’ (2020-2025) we find ourselves at the crosscurrents of hopeful possibility and anxious anticipation. The hopefulness can point to the many waves of uncharted waters that the College

has not ventured. The anxiety, however, can be caused by the unwillingness to sail beyond the familiar or the stifling fear of failure. This article entices readers and leaders alike to embrace all of these possibilities (including failure) not only for the sake of life but also to make life in the present meaningful and whole.

Within this context, justice is not legalistic as if it only exists to prevent premature death. Rather, justice is centred on life and the assurance of its flourishing. Injustice, therefore, is not the deprivation of an entitlement as such, but a failure to uphold the value of life in its fullness (John 10:10). This means that whatever hinders life or reduces the multiplicity of life (into commodities), reduces justice. By the same token, to offer people a life of mediocrity or one of survival is to offer them no more than a half-justice. As conveyed in the above interpretation, upholding and maintaining the integrity of life is instrumental in determining why suppressive borders ought to be shifted. In the words of Havea, “[t]o break through borders does not necessarily dissolve order, or break people up, but transforms and redefines who people are” (2014, 7).

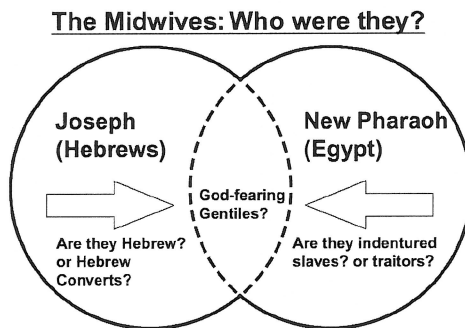
As a church, including also the theologian, it is not enough to speak about what is just without acknowledging the life-suppressing boundaries rife within our systems and admitting our complacency in the process. This means that sympathising with victims of oppression and discrimination is not enough. Exclusive acts are to be recognised as a sin against life and its perpetrators, even if internal, are to be held accountable. This is a very real challenge for churches in the United States following the recent protests ignited by the untimely death of George Floyd by the police. In this context, the church faces an uphill battle against an onslaught of racially-motivated divisions that have become so systemic that it is part of public memory, including that of the church. Pacific churches are not immune to such tensions as seen in the not too distant history of Fiji and the ongoing influx of labour migration and immigrant communities throughout the Pacific nations. Who we are as a church, therefore, depends largely on how we respond to this increasing diversity.

In this regard, *sii tuaoi* is a call to Christians and non-Christians to become midwives of life or ‘faatosaga communities’ devoted to the cultivation and continuation of life. This invitation entails the transcending of discriminatory boundaries through empathy, becoming mutually concerned for life’s sustenance or, for educators in particular, the nurturing of potential towards its endless possibilities. Those that had doubts about teachers before the pandemic lockdowns

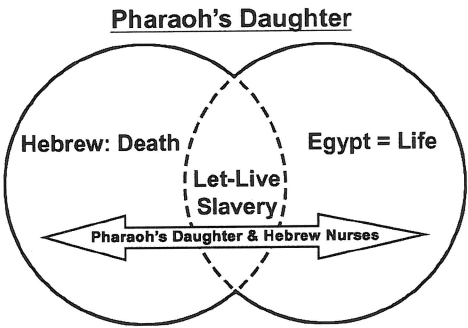
would have quickly realised how difficult their job is. This is because teaching is essentially about cultivating and influencing lives or more importantly for our young, instilling in them a culture of life. It is a timely wakeup call not just for parents and church leaders, but also educators everywhere including PTC.

Finally, the hope of producing competent leaders for justice, as envisaged by the renewed mission of PTC, needs to be understood as a necessity in the context of today's oppressive realities more than a future projection. This way, it can motivate this and other theological institutions to continually seek creative ways for life to flourish as did the Exodus women. At the very least, it ought to prevent us from succumbing to the numbness of existence or worse, evading our full possibilities. Here, Christ's invitation to his disciples is a haunting one, namely, "the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few" (Matt 9:37). The same invitation is also extended to present and potential leaders keen to labour for justice and sii tuaoi together with the God of life. Norman Cousins once said that "the tragedy of life is not death, but rather what we let die inside of us while we live" (1983). For the boundary-shifter, the options to let-die and let-live might also be too narrow.

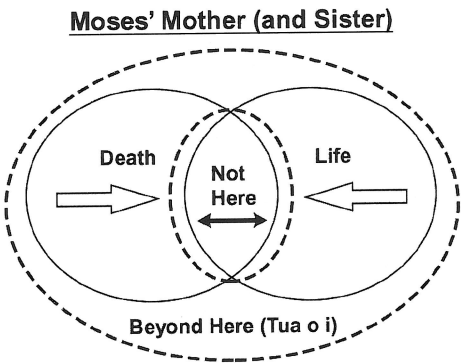
### Illustration 1: Sii tuaoi by Shiphra and Puah



**Illustration 2: Sii tuaoi by Pharaoh’s Daughter**



**Illustration 3: Sii tuaoi by Jochebed and Miriam**



**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> In this article I will be using ‘sii le tuaoi’ and ‘sii tuaoi’ interchangeably. The former refers to a singular boundary, while the latter refers to a plurality of boundaries (the omission of the definite article ‘le’). Also, I have intentionally refrained from italicizing Samoan words for the sake of mainstream conventions. While boundaries between languages are inevitable, the format change for languages other than English is for me, discriminating. That said, I have omitted the use of Samoan accent and diacritical marks (given only in the title) for easier reading.

<sup>2</sup> For a deeper investigation of the marginality of women in the Exodus story, see both

publications by Cheryl Exum (1994). There is also an interesting research article by Jennifer Lewis (2019), which focuses on Miriam's character.

<sup>3</sup> I welcome the use of the self-designated term Oceania instead of Pacific. I have decided to use Pacific or Pasefika not only to acknowledge our colonial heritage, but also because I think the politics of naming are inescapably offset by the language we are using. For an elaborate and alternative explanation of the Pacific, see Vaa'i and Casimira (2017, 7-9). For further discussion of landlocked thinking, see Winston Halapua (2010).

<sup>4</sup> This complimentary relationship has parallels with the yin yang symbol employed by Jung Young Lee to interpret the relationship of the Trinity (1996, 31ff).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel M. Carroll in his *Christians at the Border* (2008) lamented how Christians would engage the immigration debate from a political perspective and not from one that is "biblically and theologically informed" (20). Being of American and Hispanic descent, Carroll's insights are indicative of how dominant narratives can easily influence the Christian masses from his context in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Although the translation of *sii tuaoi* is closer to boundary shifting, the significance of boundary crossing and more importantly, blurring are also implied.

<sup>7</sup> For a visual overview containing these questions, see Illustration 1.

<sup>8</sup> A more detailed explanation of Samoan midwife practices is offered by Patricia J. Kinloch (1995).

<sup>9</sup> See Illustration 2 for a visual overview of this discussion.

<sup>10</sup> This was the counsel my wife was given after the births of our four children especially with reference to the breastfeeding stage. It is also conclusive with recommendations given in the World Health Organisation brief, "Postnatal Care for Mothers and Newborns" (2015). The brief encourages mothers to partake in mobility exercise when they are ready but not to engage in strenuous activities. It also contains evidence of postpartum depression, iron deficiency and other physical and emotional challenges that mothers face during the postnatal (*failele*) stage.

<sup>11</sup> For a visual overview of these overlapping boundaries, see Illustration 3.

<sup>12</sup> See 'not here' and 'beyond here' in Illustration 3.

<sup>13</sup> This line of thinking is also promoted by Musa Dube (2009) with reference to the plight of African women and their pursuit for a full life. Her article focuses on that par-



ticular story of the woman suffering from haemorrhages in Mark 5.

<sup>14</sup> To explore further on how love or alofa in Samoan connotes life-affirming movement and engagement, see Faafetai Aiava (2017, 137ff).

## References

Aiava, Faafetai. 2017. "From In-Between to *Inness*: Dehyphenating Diasporic Theologies from a Relational Perspective". In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu L. Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva, Fiji: USP and the Pacific Theological College.

Alba, Richard and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. Second Edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Boer, Roland. 2013. "Thus I Cleansed them from Everything Foreign: The Search for Subjectivity in Ezra-Nehemiah". In *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*. Edited by Roland Boer. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Cousins, Norman. 1983. "Norman Cousins talks on Positive Emotions and Health". *KCRW-FM Broadcast Interview*. Transcribed from the original broadcast by Bob Rosenbaum. Los Angeles, California. <https://www.bobrosenbaum.com/transcripts/nctalks.pdf>

Davidson et al. 2015. "RumInations". In *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible*. Edited by Steed Vernyl Davidson, Margaret Aymer and Jione Havea. Atlanta: SBL Press.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. 2007. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Dube, Musa. 2009. "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible". In *Semeia Studies: Twenty-Five Years of Liberation Theology*. Edited by Botha. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Efi, Tui Atua, T.T. 2009. "Samoan Jurisprudence and the Samoan Lands and Titles Court: The perspective of a litigant". In *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*. Edited by Tamasa'ilau Sualii-Sauni et al. Apia: National University of Samoa.

Exum, J. Cheryl. 1994a. "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live': A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10". In *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield, England: Sheffield University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1994b. "Second Thoughts About Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1:8-2:10". In *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield, England: Sheffield University Press.

Halapua, Winston. 2010. "Moana Methodology: Promoting Dynamic Leadership". In *Talanoa Ripples: Across Borders, Cultures, Disciplines*. Edited by Jione Havea, Massey: Massey University.

Hauofa, Epeli. 1993. "Our Sea of Islands." In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Island*. Edited by Eric Waddell et al. Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Havea, Jione. 2014. "Engaging scriptures from Oceania". In *Bible, borders, belonging(s): Engaging readings from Oceania*. Edited by Jione Havea, David J. Neville, & Elaine M. Wainwright. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

Kinloch, Patricia J. 1995. "Midwives and Midwifery in Samoa". In *Healing Practices in the South Pacific*. Edited by Claire Parsons. Hawaii: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University.

Lavee, Moshe and Shana Strauch-Schick. 2015. "The Egyptian Midwives". *TheTorah.com*. <https://thetorah.com/article/the-egyptian-midwives><https://thetorah.com/article/the-egyptian-midwives>

Lee, Jung Young. 1996. *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.



Lewis, Jennifer. 2019. "Girl Power Gone Right in Exodus 1-2: Miriam as Model for Contemporary Youth". *Journal of Youth and Theology*. 18:1-17.

Pratt, George. 1911. *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Apia: Malua Printing Press.

Spivak, Gayatri. 1985. "The Rani of Sirmur". In *Europe and its Others*. Vol. 1. Edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margeret Iverson, and Diana Loxley. Colchester: University of Essex Press.

Tuwere, Ilatia S. 2002. *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Vaai, Upolu L. 2015. "A Theology of Talalasi: Challenging the 'One Truth' Ideology of the Empire". *Pacific Journal of Theology*. 54 (2):1-19.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2017. "Relational Hermeneutics: A Return to Relationality of the Pacific Itulagi as a Lens for Understanding and Interpreting Life". In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: University of the South Pacific and the Pacific Theological College.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2019. "We are therefore we live: Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Change Story". *Toda Peace Institute*. Policy Brief No. 56. [https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-56\\_upolu-luma-vaai\\_we-are-therefore- we-live.pdf?v=0](https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-56_upolu-luma-vaai_we-are-therefore- we-live.pdf?v=0)

Vaai, Upolu Lumā and Aisake Casimira (eds). 2017. *Relational hermeneutics: Decolonising the mindset and the Pacific itulagi*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

World Health Organization. 2015. "Postnatal Care for Mothers and Newborns: Highlights from the World Health Organization 2013 Guidelines". World Health Organization and Jhpiego. [https://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/publications/WHO-MCA-PNC-2014- Briefer\\_A4.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/publications/WHO-MCA-PNC-2014- Briefer_A4.pdf?ua=1)

*All biblical quotations in this article were taken from the New Revised Standard Version.*





### **Dr Gladson Jathanna**

*Gladson Jathanna is a  
Senior Lecturer in the  
department of History  
of Christianity at PTC.*

*Originally from  
South India.*

## ***Resistance, Resilience and Radical Justice***

### **Reimagining Theological Research in the Pacific**

*The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises smile that is knowing and distrustful.*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research, in an indigenous, colonial and post-colonial context, is not *just* about an academic activity required for a degree. It is a potential political tool either to legitimize and perpetuate the prevailing unjust colonial and imperial orders or to contest, resist and dismantle such orders. Linda Smith calls it 'one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' because "[t]he ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized people. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity" (2012, 1). Theological researches in an indigenous and (post)colonial context must be located within such a dirtied discourse of colonialism

and imperialism. Since there is no neutral research, especially in the face of empire, our reasoning of Christian theologies and Christian past also cannot be neutral, but ought to be political. This article addresses the importance of the politics and ethics of research in a post-colonial Pacific context where colonial and neo-colonial empires still seek to extend their control as far as possible; not only geographically, politically, and economically but also intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and culturally. Hence, theological research must be seen as a political and ethical responsibility in which the researcher is ought to take a bold stand resisting the empires that attempt to establish the colonial and euro-centric *single-truth*, erasing and demonizing the *multiple-truths* celebrated by the indigenous communities. As a researcher from a *marginal location* that shares a colonial and indigenous experiences with the Pacific, I try to reimagine a radical reversal of research space in the Pacific based on my personal experiences *in the margins*. It is that shared marginal space that invokes me to engage in this personal combat. As the feminists would say, “personal is political” (Butler 2003, 418), I would affirm, personal is academic.<sup>1</sup> Hence, I bring in here several personal experiences from my own *marginal* context to demonstrate how a non-conformist resilience in theological research in the Pacific could act as an epistemic and ethical resistance to the empire.

### **Beware of the Contaminated Theological Library/Archival Space!**

When students come to the theological colleges in the Pacific, or in any indigenous, colonial and post-colonial contexts, to begin their theological studies or to pursue their higher education as researchers, one of the obvious places that they would spend most of their time is *libraries* and *archives* that monumentalise theologies. I call it obvious because, as Linda Smith rightly states that books and written documents are considered to be fundamental to academic discourse in a dominant research-setup (2012, 36). Students are made to internalize that there is hardly any possibility to conduct an *academically qualified research* outside the constructed walls of libraries and archives, however suffocative those spaces may be. But what we see, hear, smell, touch and read in our theological libraries matter a lot in defining our research-outcomes. Whose voices are echoed inside those glossy, giant, glittery papers that decorate our library racks? Whose odour do we smell in those dusty old volumes preserved in our ‘strong rooms’ or archives? What theological positions do our libraries and archival holdings introduce to our students? Undoubtedly, a predominant part of the books in our libraries is authored and articulated by the Western and non-in-



digenous theologians and intellectuals. Even when the subject of the books is *the indigenous people, communities and cultures*, if the authorship is alien to the spirit of idigenism, that can be hazardous for the indigenous communities and the people. As Maori writer Patricia Grace argues, these books can be hazardous and dangerous to our students in the Pacific (1985). She lists out four important reasons for why she thinks that these books can be hazardous:

1. They do not reinforce our values, actions, customs, culture and identity;
2. When they tell us only about others they are saying that we do not exist;
3. They may be writing about us but are writing things which are untrue;
4. They are writing about us but saying negative and insensitive things which tell us that we are not good (1985).

As a researcher from a marginal post-colonial location and community in India, I can very well relate myself with this brutally bold and brave observation. Right from the initial years of my theological studies, much of what was available for me to read in the Indian theological colleges were all Western theologies, Indian church histories written by the Western missionaries/historians or Indian historians who wrote our histories within the western framework, the ‘research-findings’ of the Western ethnologists and Indologists who ‘researched’ and represented ‘Indian’ customs and cultures, and so on. They were all mere commonly circulated beliefs of the Western imperialists and the Indian intellectuals, who subscribed to the western epistemologies without questioning them; thus they were far from truth. As Edward Said said, “What is commonly circulated by it is not truth but representation” (1978, 21). Such representations made the core of colonial discourse. As Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson state, “Colonialism [...] is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” (1994, 3). It is through such a system of representation that theological libraries share the colonial discourse. The language of the books we read in our libraries mirror the language of the empire: ‘to save the natives of the pacific,’ pacific as a ‘dark continent,’ ‘civilizing the uncivilized islanders,’ ‘ignorant and superstitious heathens,’ ‘lazy people,’ so on and so forth. Such vocabularies display well the oriental and imperial world-view that the books share with the colonial empires. That is why there is an urgent need to reimagine our researches beyond the constructed library walls. This is where the invitation of Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba, to view *research as ceremony*



should matter to us. While talking to his research partner in an indigenous context, he says, “We are in a research ceremony. We gain knowledge and power from the universe around us in various ways. You know, that knowledge can come to you from above, from a flash of inspiration, or as I see it, from putting form to a bundle of relationships that were previously invisible” (2008, 111).

On the other hand, theological researches, especially in my own field of history of Christianity in the Pacific, seem to submissively try to fit in the western framework of researches, by rigorously attempting to be ‘archive-based’ and/or written-document/evidence-based research. It looks like the Church-historians in the Pacific have misunderstood Nicolas B. Dirks’ words that “... historians can only really become historians or write history once they have been to the archive” (2002, 48), and completely missed his caution that “[t]he archive is simultaneously the outcome of historical process and the very condition for the production of historical knowledge” (48). If our researches dream to do justice to our own people whose epistemologies and experiences are demonized and thus colonized for centuries, we have no other option but dare to break the archival walls. To help such a process and to challenge the contaminated space of the archive-based researches Jacques Derrida coined the term “archive fever” (1995). This term captures the anxieties about the contamination of archival history that has generated debates about the future of history in the last two decades of the twentieth century (1995, 15-16). The alternative modes of analysis of history demanded a need to move out of the ‘archive-based’ research, to use ‘extra-archival’ sources and to produce ‘history’ in a kind of popular culture. This movement opened up new frontiers for the production of research in general, historical research in particular (P. J. Voss and M. L. Werner 1999, 1). However, these movements did not go uncriticized. Such critics, especially the historians of British Empire and colonialism, often called for a ‘return to the archive’ (C. Steedman 2001). These conflicts have lead the historians to find possibilities to respect the traditional archives on the one hand and to be critical about its distortions, skeptical about its single-truth-claims and suspicious about its collaborations with power agencies, the empires (Steedman 2001, 1163).

Yet, there is a tendency among the mission/church-historians to undermine any historical research and exploration which is not done within the premise of the ‘archives’ (Walls 2002, 1-21). As argued above, mission archives do provide us with an enormous amount of sources upon which the history of Christianity

can be partially understood, but not entirely. And, moreover, this must not lead the historians to overlook the panoptical space of mission archives.<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault uses the idea of panopticon as a metaphor for technologies of modern power. He argues that it is a model where the prison, the asylum and the hospital embody the same will to omnipotence, and to disciplinary formation, that the archive also does (1973; 1977). This claim has been taken further by some scholars to demonstrate that researches, especially on race, class, gender and ethnicity, have to take the panoptical space of the archive into serious consideration (Said 1978; Spivak 1985; Chakrabarty 1992). In the recent years, the danger of archive-based researches are brought to the limelight more rigorously than ever before. James Epstein, for example, goes to the extent of talking about “archival violence” (2012, Chapter 7). He argues that the archives need to be subjected to “continuous suspicion and radical doubt” because they have the potential to be violent against the powerless and the subjects of the empire (2012, 228-229). Though these scholars have not denied the relevance of archive for the ‘production and reproduction’ of history, they call for a move beyond the institutional archival space and the recognition of the capacity and resourcefulness of ‘extra-archival’ sources. This is very crucial in an indigenous context where ‘archiving’ in a Western notion is not part of the indigenous practices. It is not to propose that the indigenous people and communities do not ‘archive’ their experiences, but they do not follow the Western norm of monumentalizing archival act.

Identifying the ‘importance’ and ‘limitations’ of archival space, thus, becomes an important starting point to read the archives in parallel to the extra-archival documents, especially in a non-western context. The recognition that the archives are contaminated and distorted must lead us to explore different possibilities of breaking the archival walls. Listening to the silences of indigenous people within the archives is one such possibility to break those walls that are constructed by the western colonial agency. Discerning the indigenous voices in oral forms such as native art, music, dances, ceremonial celebrations, rituals, tattoos etc., and thus identifying these sources as authentic documents is an important tool to break the dominant ‘archival’ walls and to re-imagine its wider space. This even demands the necessity to extend the archival space by considering the ‘extra- archival’ documents as ‘archival’ since they preserve untold stories of subalterns for centuries (Jathanna 2020, 170-183).

## Towards a *Spirit-Based Research*: Personal Desire and ‘Peculiar’ Passion Matter

When I started my doctoral research in Germany,<sup>3</sup> I had to first of all find an answer to the question that bothered me for so long – why do I *have to* undertake a research, particularly in a ‘foreign’ land. Finally, after a long struggle, to answer that question I took refuge in Stephen Greenblatt’s words: because ‘I desire to speak with the dead’ (1988, 1). In his celebrated opening to *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt expresses his ‘desire’ to give ear to the dead non-elite voices in history. The *personal desire* to speak with the dead (or better say, the murdered), thus, became my motivation and starting point to unearth the buried bodies and spirits of my ancestors, which were cremated in the mission-libraries and mission-archives in a ‘foreign’ land (See, Jathanna 2015).

However, in the theological research pitch, quite often, if not always, the *personal desire* and *peculiar passion* of the researcher are downplayed over against the myth of *academic objectivity*. This becomes more crucial, especially in an indigenous context like that of the Pacific, where the *personal* experiences strive to be articulated *in the margins* through *liminal perspectives*. As the African-American scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings, whose contributions on indigenous pedagogies challenged the dominant western pedagogical frameworks, argues, “...the work of the liminal perspective is to reveal the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out of the mainstream” (2001, 257). The *desire* to give ear to the unheard voices of our own people who died voiceless, and the *passion* to reckon with the dead and living spirits, thus, need to be the presiding paths in the journey towards and throughout our theological research. Such a *desire* and *passion* are theological incentives.

But then again we are reminded by Derrida that “There is then some spirit. Spirits. And one must reckon with them” (1994, xx). When thinking of *re-searching* in the margins, a post-colonial location, be it in India or in the Pacific, one has to reckon with many spirits and also with Spirits, the capitalised. It is an engagement with the spirits that are dead, buried and yet striving to resurrect. It is also an engagement with the Spirits that tried and have been trying to claim power and knowledge on the dead ones. The spirits had left the ‘body’ long ago. They are no more there where they were once buried. Yet, the cemeteries have to be consulted, for there should be some remnant. But there are Spirits,

the capitalised ones. Beware, they may distort and destroy the remnants, the buried body! It is now a challenge to reckon with them, in order to let the spirits sing their saga of the past and bodies reincarnate. To do that what we need is a radical shift from our dominant library/archive based research to a subaltern/indigenous *spirit-based research*.

How do we possibly do that in a context where our research-culture is culturally oppressive, intellectually imperial and academically inadequate? Upolu Vaai has rightly identified it in his struggle with the existing theological paradigm in the Pacific, which is highly Euro-centric, when he wrote, “Pacific scholars and academics have [...] been agents of the dominant cultures by adopting academic paradigms that are incapable of liberating the victimised Pacific communities...” (2017, 18). In line with that profound critique, I call the present framework of research, in which we try to fit-in our ‘indigenous’ researches, as oppressive and inadequate mainly because they are not contextually-based, in other words, they are not contextual-spirit-based. While proposing a *spirit-based methodology* of research in the indigenous contexts, Annita Lucchesi argues that

[c]ommunities of color, Indigenous communities, poor communities, and queer communities have survived centuries of mass death and calculated, well-organized attempts to silence, abuse, torture, and erase their existences. The systems of oppression that remain responsible for this violence also remain deeply entrenched in academia and in research circles, and the burden of doing research to dismantle this oppression and (re)generate healthy ways of being without adequate support is literally making us sick. I propose spirit-based research as one way of conducting decolonizing, regenerative work, that not only guides us in ending violence in our communities, but can help us physically, mentally, and spiritually survive as we take these efforts on (2019, 1).

What she means by spirit-based research is this: “Spirit-based research is work that is rooted in the researcher’s spiritual practices and beliefs, the spirits impacted by and involved in the work, and the researcher’s spirit itself” (2019, 2). At the same time, she identifies that it is difficult to concretely define or explain, particularly in a language recognizable by mainstream academia.

Spirituality based on the worship and accession of forces of nature, spirits, animals, ancestors, departed heroes and the like are common to all the indigenous communities of the world. However, Western Christianity while ‘analyzing’ it from its Euro-centric worldview could not help but demonize such spiritual practices of the indigenous communities.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, reclaiming those demonized spirit(s) in our theological researches in an indigenous and post-colonial context is a subversive tool and act of resilience and resistance to the colonial imperial scars that the indigenous people carry on their bodies and minds. Such spirit-based researches, that make the spirits resurrect, can bring radical justice to the people and communities that are demonized for their ‘different’ spirituality for centuries. As one of the most prophetic voices of the Pacific, Albert Wendt articulated his spirit-filled spirituality so profoundly, “Our dead are woven into our souls like the hypnotic music of bone flutes: we can ever escape them. If we let them they can help illuminate us to ourselves and to one another. They can be the source of new- found pride, self-respect, and wisdom” (1976, 50). And his later poetic musings in his poem *Inside Us the Dead* make it all the more powerful and compelling:

Inside us the dead,  
like eet-honeyed tamarind pods  
that will burst in tomorrow’s sun,  
or plankton fossils in coral  
alive at full moon dragging  
virile tides over coy reefs  
into yesterday’s lagoons (Wendt 1980, 284)

Spirit-based researches are rooted in their conversation with the dead whose spirits continue to live and resist any form of imperial and colonial oppressive structures and thus stand as the source of liberation and justice. As Vaai rightly puts it, “The lies of colonisation are the seeds of empire, but the resilience of its victims is the seed of liberation” (2017, 19). Theological researches in the context of empire, thus, must act as the real *seedbed*<sup>5</sup> of liberation of not only those spirits of the indigenous life-worlds that are trolled, mocked and laughed at and mercilessly demonized, but also of those imperial Spirits that need to be redeemed from their sins of imperialism and colonial occupation of their other

## Resting the Time and Resisting the Theories

One of the ‘common’ complaints that we often hear in the Pacific about our research students is that our students do not follow a strict time-frame. This led me to seriously struggle to understand the validity of this complaint and the cultural matrix of this ‘reality.’ I am deeply indebted to Jione Havea, a Biblical scholar from the Pacific, who helped me in my search for meanings of ‘delays’ in the Pacific. Writing about the philosophy of time in the Pacific, Havea says that in the Pacific, “We spend time, but time does not spend us” (2013, 297). He further states, “We live in the ebbs and flows of island currents. There is no pressure to rush. We enjoy “spending time”, but others might see us as simply “wasting time”. To us, time is fluid and elastic rather than pre-set and rigid... A hidden dimension of viewing time as flexible is the strong (communalist rather than individualist) concerns of island people” (2013, 297). How can we anticipate a time-bound research project from a student who embodies such a philosophy of time which is radically ‘different’ from the Western notion of time that is inherently rigid and inextricably fixed? Is it not an unethical and colonial act of domesticating the research and the researcher, expecting him/her to be tamed within a pre-set time-frame whereas s/he looks at time as fluid and elastic? This is where another Pacific scholar Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka’uta’s intriguing statement on the very notion of research becomes so important and compelling when she says,

Research...is an imposed system of doing, comprised of imported structures and processes that bring with them specific philosophies and ways of learning and knowing. These are structures and processes which perpetuate the originating knowledge-bases situated in the Global North (West) and locate research within a set of paradigms, each with their own ontological, epistemological, methodological, pedagogical and exiological assumptions about the world and human engagement within that world (2017, 67).

This challenges us in the Pacific to redeem our research frameworks from the colonial dominance of the western philosophies of time and theories.

“Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory”, says Linda Smith in her groundbreaking work *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012, 39). Examine, analyse, investigate, measure, compare, substantiate with evidence



and so on – these are the colonial vocabularies and phrases often used in any research activity. But the question, how do we do that, is dependent on the ‘application of theories’. This poses a potential perspectival problem to our researching. Who sets the ‘theories’ to do such ‘examination’, ‘analysis’, and ‘investigation’? Kathie Irwin says, “We don’t need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools – it always has. This power is ours” (1992, 5). In other words, the indigenous researcher needs to not just *frame her/his research question* rather s/he must *question the research-frame* that is imposed on her/him, in order to find relevant tools of research that fit the context of the researcher well.

While talking about the problems of dry theories in the Pacific history researches, Brij Lal argues that “The human mind or the creative spirit should not be shackled by arid theory, which should reflect rather than determine experience” (Lal 2007, 196). When theories control the experiences of a researcher, what comes out as a result is mere an arid cerebral rigid discourse of single-truth, and not the negotiable, alterable and even discardable imagination of multiple-truths. In fact, theory and methodology are alien terms and concepts for the indigenous communities that celebrate the existence of multiple-truths. Thus it requires an entirely different definition that is evolved and strongly rooted in the living context of the researcher. While offering an appropriate research hermeneutic in a Pacific context, Vaai makes it very clear that “hermeneutics from a Pacific perspective is less about methods to secure and examine abstract truths, as in academia, but rather about relational expressions of life, about how a person freely dialogues and connects with his/her whole *itulagi*, and about how this holistic context shapes one’s imagination and the search for meaning” (2017, 23). One has to note here the emphasis on the fluidity and flexibility of the research-space in the Pacific. Such fluidity, flexibility and elasticity redeem the researcher from the *idolatry* of rigid and fixed theories and methodologies of the West.

An imposition of a fixed time-bound research-framework and ready-made research methodologies and theories in an indigenous context are not just imperial but also racist in many ways, because they privilege one set of knowledge-system and disadvantage other communities and people and their knowledge-patterns. It is an epistemological racism, as James Joseph Scheurich and Michelle D. Young call it. In their self-reflexive article, “Coloring Epistemologies: Are

Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?” they admit that

In a very important sense, we White researchers are unconsciously promulgating racism on an epistemological level. As we teach and promote epistemologies like positivism to postmodernism, we are, at least implicitly, teaching and promoting the social history of the dominant race at the exclusion of people of color, scholars of color, and the possibility for research based on other race/culture epistemologies (1997, 11).

These self-reflexive words are very true in any indigenous contexts. Our research-spaces are bound by a continued epistemological racism where single-White-race-ideology is privileged over the multiple-lived-experiences and beliefs of the indigenous communities. Relating this to the Pacific context, Vakauta asserts that “[b]lind epistemological racism is continuously perpetuated” in the Pacific island region (2017, 69). And the islanders are challenged to see such racism as ‘the symbol of all repression’, as Wendt puts it (1976, 50). This challenge and realization have led many indigenous researchers around the world in general, and in the Pacific in particular, to strive for multiple indigenous research paradigms that authentically voice out the indigenous experiences without bothering much about the rigid western theories and methodologies.<sup>6</sup> However, how much the theological research space in the Pacific has achieved this is still a question. Even though the theological libraries in the Pacific have the abundance of Bachelor, Master theses written on Pacific topics, what perspectives do those researches share is still a question of enquiry. Even today, miserably enough, we read theses in theological colleges in the Pacific that reflect and seem to uphold Western imperial and racist notion of the Pacific as ‘uncivilized’, ‘superstitious’, ‘heathen’, ‘uncultured’ and so on. It is in this context, we need to strive for alternative research methodologies that are liberative, justice-oriented, bold, brave and non-conformist.

### **Non-Conformism in Research as an Epistemic and Ethical Resistance to the Empire**

“Education is a path to conformity,” says Didi Kirsten Tatlow, an educationist (2010). Albert Wendt recognizes such conformity as a tool to domesticate all human kind. He says, “The basic function of Education in all cultures is to promote conformity and obedience and respect, to fit children into roles society has

determined for them. In practice it has always been an instrument of domesticating humankind with” (1976, 55). Conformism in a research space perpetuates the existing imperial unjust order. It rejects plurality, multiplicity and then seeks to make others subject to an absolutist worldview which massacres multiple truths and enthrones single-truth which is highly oppressive and unjust. Conformism in the context of theological education in the so-called third world has resulted in institutional and epistemic colonialism. We need to have the humility and ability to admit the failure of our theological education in fighting against conformism within the church and our theological institutions. As Noam Chomsky opines, “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies” (2008, 40). As theological researchers, it is our responsibility to expose bundles of lies within our theological educational space and in the institutional Church.

Conformism has promoted the culture of surveillance in theological colleges and universities worldwide. Even without the institutional and authoritarian surveillance, the students have internalized fear and conformity and that is reflected in their researches. They are afraid to get into trouble. Fear of down-grading, fear of suspension and many such fears threaten the very lives of the researchers. As Foucault argues, discipline always creates “docile bodies,” and to construct docile bodies the disciplinary institutions must be able to (a) constantly observe and record the bodies they control and (b) ensure the internalization of the disciplinary individuality within the bodies being controlled (1977, 135-169).

As Sebastian Kappen, a well-known theologian from the global south, argues, while suggesting radical correction to Marx’s critique of capitalism, that scientific rationality would not solve all human problems, but we need “a prophetic-ethical spirit” too (1992, 13). Kappen’s evaluation, in my opinion, is a self-reflexive one. By ‘scientific rationality’ he doesn’t refer only to Marx’s soteriological view on science and technology, rather he emphasises on the wider intellectual resistance to any kind of authoritarianism. Thus he invites researchers and intellectuals to cultivate a prophetic resistance tooled by ethical commitments. The “prophetic” image, perhaps, comes from the Biblical and theological engagement of Kappen. Therefore, “the prophetic spirit” invokes an engaged and committed critique of the system rather a fashionable liberalism of interest groups within the church and theological institutions which criticize the leadership for vested interests.

It is in this context the need for a renewed pedagogy becomes inevitable. The present pedagogies of our theological researches are highly repressive and fear-ridden and such pedagogies have very destructive effects on the minds and bodies of the students. Therefore, we need to strive for an alternative pedagogy which instills life giving spirits in the minds and bodies of the researchers and enables them to courageously endorse dissent and non-conformity even if it is a costly affair. Theological education must confess that conformity is a sin because we prefer to stay away from the vocation of renewing and reforming our Churches and institutions through our researches. Only through such confessions and through our search for alternatives can our theological campuses be renovated into a place of freedom, life and radical justice.

When I submitted my doctoral dissertation to the University of Goettingen in Germany, I received a seven-pages-long review of my thesis by a German intellectual, as part of my examination report. The underlining critique of that review was that my research ‘did not fit into the German standard of intellectual enquiry,’ mainly because I was not taking an *objective* intellectual enquiry to the subject of research. He was indeed right. I was not *objective* in my enquiry of the past. In fact, I could not afford to be *objective*. In other words, I was not privileged to be *objective*. It was my unprivileged ‘academic’ and research ethics that compelled me to passionately and subjectively (which was my conscious choice) argue for my own people and culture that were misrepresented, dehumanized, demonized and unjustly buried in the mission-archives. And, moreover, I never intended to *fit into* ‘the German standard of intellectual enquiry.’ However, since then I have been struggling with the question: what is, after all, an intellectual? Peter Ronald deSouza, an Indian professor, emphasises that a researcher ‘has to be a social critic’, more ‘public’ than ‘intellectual’ (2015, 82). By invoking ‘intellectual honesty’ between thought and action, deSouza defines a public intellectual as someone able to bring critical questioning to matters of interest to the public. Romila Thapar, a subaltern historian, traces the meaning of the term ‘intellectual’ and observes that the meaning of intellectual “crystallized around the notion that such a person need not be a scholar but had to be someone who... sought explanations for public actions from those in authority, even if such explanations required criticizing authority and power” (2015, 5). Taking the example of Socrates, Neeladri Bhattacharya opines that, “Socrates had to die not because he believed in a truth that he refused to give up. He possibly died because he refused to give up his right to question, examine and negate, not just authority but everything” (2015, 105). Unfortunately, what we witness today in the

theological research setup world-wide, and especially in the global south, is the shrinking of democratic space to express voices of dissent and the erosion of courage to confront empires of the past and of our time. We find our *intellectual class* seeking refuge in self-censorship and co-option to protect their positions and even their very lives. As Peter deSouza observes, when dissent can result in dangerous consequences, the intellectual class is infected with a subterranean fear of the empires (2015, 94).

As theological researchers, we need to affirm our ethical positioning as both intellectuals as well as we are a part of the people/public. Hence, our research work can never be an innocent act of comfort-zoned academic and 'intellectual' engagement but a radical political and ethical responsibility, where we ought to take a bold stand of resisting the empires of our time that attempt to bury the marginal *multiple-truths* and celebrate the falsehood of *single-truth*. As Vaai painfully notes, "Now we see that most religions, including Christianity, and most cultures, including Pacific cultures, have institutionalized this idea of *one truth* in their knowledge, educational, political, church, and village/tribal systems" (2016, 51). Our non-conformism to such institutionalization of single-truth ideologies should be the ethical assertion of our theological researches. Such researches may not escape controlling scrutiny and a forcible marginality. Today, the challenge for theological researchers is to have the daring to be questioned and converted by the sidelined alternative researches of dissent and non-conformity in the history of collective Christian faith. This is where I find the profound statement of M.M. Thomas, a significant Indian Christian theologian, so compelling. He says, "What is real church history? It is not the history of its popes and archbishops--no, not at all. It is the history of people who filled with the vision of a redeemed Church, created strife and division within the church--it is the history of Luthers and Abraham Malpans<sup>7</sup>--of its heretics excommunicated, of its infidels martyred, for causing revolution in the church. If we are to be worthy of that heritage let us make quarrels and more quarrels for the sake of its redemption" (1983, 29).

## Conclusion

John Rajchman once said, "affirmation of our subjectivity does not basically lie in the discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized, and classified" (1984, 15). If our theological commitments do not lead our researches to rebel against

those ways in which we are already defined, categorized and classified by the empires of the past and of our time, it means that we are on a dangerous edge. This article attempted to caution our theological research-endeavors, especially in the Pacific, of *that* danger. The article is consciously located within the historical transition that the Pacific Theological College is experiencing while celebrating her 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the vision *towards excellence in theological education for leadership for justice*. Holding on to justice as one of the core values of the College, our researches, through resistance and non-conformity, need to disturb the empires that strive hard to maintain an unjust order and invade the vulnerable and the less-privileged people in the margins.

I believe that it is quite fitting to conclude this paper with a profoundly powerful poem, *Kidnapped*, by Ruperake Petaia from Western Samoa, that makes a strong critique of the imperial education system, which still stands as a reminder for our own self-reflexive imaginations of our theological educational spaces:

I was six when  
Mama was careless  
She sent me to school alone  
five days a week  
One day I was  
kidnapped by a band  
of Western philosophers  
armed with glossy-pictured  
textbooks and registered reputations  
'Holder of B.A. and M.A. degrees'  
I was held  
in a classroom  
guarded by Churchill and Garibaldi  
pinned up on one wall and  
Hitler and Mao dictating from the other....  
On my release  
fifteen years after  
I was handed  
[among loud applause  
from fellow victims]  
a piece of paper  
to decorate my walls  
certifying my release (Cited in Wendt 1976, 54-55)



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I have been struggling for long with the Eurocentric institutionalized binary separating the academic from the personal and at the same time with the ambiguity of venerating Western/European personal in the academia and devaluing all other personals by labelling them 'non-academic'. Candace Spigelman's work on personal experiences as evidence in academic discourse has been quite inspirational for me in this struggle-filled journey (See Spigelman 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The panopticon originally means a blueprint for the modern prison and later the work-house. For further details, see Burton 2003, 140–143.

<sup>3</sup> A geographical location with which I was made to associate my Christian origin, without having an option, as it was those German missionaries who 'christianized' my fore-parents in a colonial context.

<sup>4</sup> I have elsewhere demonstrated how the *Bhuta (Spirit) Worship* of my own ancestors was mistranslated by the Basel Missionaries as *Devil Worship* and thus demonized our Spirit-based spiritualities and practices. See, Jathanna 2016, 26-48.

<sup>5</sup> I use this term *Seedbed* as it denotes the original meaning of the term *Seminary* which was first used by Cardinal Reginald Pole, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The original intention in establishing seminaries was, "as in a seedbed, to plant a large number of candidates, care for them in their growth process, and finally transplant them to the places where their ministry was to take place." See Gonzalez 2015, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Much of the references in this paper shows the vast arena of such attempts.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Malpan is popularly known as the 'Martin Luther of the East', who initiated a reformation within his Church in India and, as a consequence, was labeled as 'heretic' and was excommunicated from his Church.

## References

Burton, A. 2003. *Dwelling in the Archive. Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2013. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". In *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim. London: Routledge.

Chakrabarthi, Deepesh. 1992. "The Death of History? Historical Consciousness and the Culture of Late Capitalism". *Public Culture*. 4/2: 47–65.

Chomsky, Noam. 2008. "The Responsibility of Intellectuals". In *The Essential Chomsky*. Edited by Anthony Arnone. New York & London: The New Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx. The State Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1995. *Archive Fever*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

deSouza, Peter Ronald. 2015. "Living Between Thought and Action". In *The Public Intellectual in India*. Edited by Romila Thapar et.al. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.

Dirks, Nicholas B. 2002. "Anals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History". In *From the Margins. Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*. Edited by B. K. Axel. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Epstein, James. 2012. *Scandal of Colonial Rule. Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Foucault, Michel. 1973. *The Birth of Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Pantheon.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1977. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.

Gonzalez, Justo L. 2015. *The History of Theological Education*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Grace, Patricia. 1985. Cited by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Second Edition. London & New York: Zed Books.

Greenblatt, Stephen. 1988. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Havea, Jione. 2013. "From Reconciliation to Adoption. A *Talanoa* from Oceania".

In *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*. Edited by Robert Schreiter and Knud Jorgensen. Oxford: Regnum Books International.

Irwin, Kathie. 1992. "Towards Theories of Maori Feminism". In *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Edited by Rosemary du Plessis. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Jathanna, Gladson. 2015. *Mode of Mutuality in the Margins of Mission. Hermannsburg Women Mission in India*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2016. "Spirit Deified and Spirits Demonized: The Euro-Christian Representation of Bhuta/Spirit Worship in Tulunadu". *SATHRI Journal*. Vol.X/ No.1 April: 26-48.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2020. "Postcolonial Re-imaginings: Interrogating Archival Space in Indo-European Encounters". In *Postkolonialismus, Theologie und die Konstruktion des Anderen / Postcolonialism, Theology and the Construction of the Other*. Edited by Britta Konz, Bernhard Ortmann and Christian Wetz. Leiden: Brill.

Kappen, Sebastian. 1992. *The Future of Socialism and Future of the Socialism*. Bangalore: Visthar.

Koya-Vaka'uta, Cresantia Frances. 2017. "Rethinking Research as Relational Space in the Pacific". In *Relational Hermeneutics. Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Luma Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: The University of the South Pacific and The Pacific Theological College.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 2001. "Racialized Discourse and Ethnic Epistemologies". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Second Edition. Edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. Thousand Hills: Sage Publications.

Lal, Brij V. 2007. "Pacific history matters". *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*. 125/2:193-200.

Lucchesi, Annita Hetoevèhotohke'e. 2019. "Spirit-Based Research: A Tactic for Surviving Trauma in Decolonizing Research". *Journal of Indigenous Research*. Vol.7/Iss.1. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol7/iss1/4>

Rajchman, John. 1984. "The Story of Foucault's History". *Social Text*. 8: 3-24.

- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism. Western Constructions of the Orient*. London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Scheurich, James Joseph and Michelle D. Young. 1997. "Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?" *Educational Researcher*. Vol. 26/No. 4 May: 4-16
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Second Edition. London & New York: Zed Books.
- Spigelman, Candace. 2004. *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 1985. "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives". *History and Theory*. 24/3: 247–272
- Steedman, C. 2001. "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida and Dust", *American Historical Review*. 106/4:1159–1180.
- Tatlow, Didi Kirsten. 2010. "Education as a Path to Conformity". *New York Times*. Jan 26. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/27/world/asia/27iht-letter.html>
- Thapar, Romila. 2015. *The Public Intellectual in India*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.
- Thomas, M.M. 1983. *Ideological Quest within Christian Commitment 1939-1954*. Bangalore/Madras: CISRS/CLS.
- Tiffin, Chris and Alan Lawson. 1994. "Introduction: The textuality of Empire". In *De-Scribing Empire. Post-colonialism and textuality*. Edited by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson. London & New York: Routledge.
- Vaai, Upolu Luma. 2016. "A Theology of Talalasi: Challenging the 'One Truth' Ideology of the Empire". *The Pacific Journal of Theology*. II/55: 50-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. "Relational Hermeneutics. A Return to the Relationality of the Pacific Itulagi as a Lens for Understanding and Interpreting Life". In *Relational Hermeneutics. Decolonising Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Luma

Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: The University of the South Pacific and The Pacific Theological College.

Voss, P. J. and M. L. Werner. 1999. "Toward a Poetics of the Archive". *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. Special Issue: "The Poetics of the Archive". 32/1: i–viii.

Walls, A. F. 2002. "Eusebius Tries Again. The Task of Reconceiving and Re-visioning the study of Christian History". In *Enlarging the Story. Perspectives on Writing World Christian History*. Edited by W. R. Shenk. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Wendt, Albert. 1976. "Towards a New Oceania". *Mana Review*. Vol.1/Iss.1: 49-60.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1980. "Making Histories". In *Lali: A Pacific Anthology*. Edited by Albert Wendt. Auckland: Longman Paul. Reprinted in Robert Borofsky (ed.). 2000. *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts. An Invitation to Remake History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Wilson, Shawn. 2008. *Research Is Ceremony. Indigenous Research Methods*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

---





## *At Home in the Pacific Five Millennia and Counting*

**Decolonising Pacific Institutions of Higher  
Learning and Research Methodologies and  
the Role of Research Institutions like the  
Pacific Theological College**

**Prof. Dr Unaisi Nabobo Baba**

*Professor in Educational  
Research at Fiji National  
University; formerly a  
Tenured Professor of  
Education at the University of  
Guam and faculty member at  
USP before that.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Pacific peoples have inhabited our landscapes and seascapes for over thousands of years. We have survived and have lived sustainably – the proof of which is apparent today – in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Pacific. We have knowledge systems, philosophies of life, life ways and values that predate the colonisation by the West. In today's higher education institutions however there is a gap to be filled in terms of democratising the academy to include Pacific knowledge systems and philosophies of sustainable livelihoods – deeply imbued in ecological respect for all beings, and all planets. This is where decolonising indigenous post qualitative research has a role.

What's missing in the literature today is the cel-



celebration of those that think differently about different knowledge systems as well as those who design research as informed by that in the Pacific. The concept of “man” or *Anthropos*, for instance, as subject of research, is conceptualised in many different ways in the Pacific and other once colonised countries. The colonial experience and neo colonial experience frame the way we decolonise methodologies, frame research and writing Pacific knowledge that are in themselves needing decolonising. Critical inclusions of knowledge ecologies and systems *anciently* birthed and developed in our Blue Continent must be included in mainstream institutions.

This article presents the case, therefore, for the celebration of Pacific knowledge systems and Pacific decolonised research framework. Before it does this, it reflectively acknowledges the decolonising work done by the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in over the decades which other institutions have taken on rather slowly in the Pacific. I examine the important role therefore that I see an institution like PTC can play moving into a future that strategically centres the Pacific in its delivery. This could be in its content delivery as well as in its research strategy. This could also be via an emergent Pacific School of Thought focusing on indigenous research and thought and also those in hybridity and evolving.

### **Movement to Independence and Decolonisation in the Pacific Islands<sup>1</sup>**

Countries in the Pacific Islands were entering Independence around the 1960's and early 70's. This was an interesting time! Samoa was first in 1962, Fiji in 1970 and Solomon Islands for instance on 7 July 1978, following the independence of neighbouring Papua New Guinea (PNG) from Australia in 1975. Sir Peter Kenilorea was the first Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands who was a stabilising force like his other regional counterparts at the time. Sir Baddley Devesi led alongside him for much of that time as Solomon Islands' Governor General. Educated in Fiji, at the Lelean Memorial School like other leaders in Solomon Islands at the time, Sir Devesi, from Guadalcanal, was a good balancing act to the Malaita leader in Sir Peter Kenilorea. This is true of my observations of Fiji's leadership choices too at that time.

I highlight this as an example of alliances, intra and inter country, which appeared and were important post-independence, that reflect an age old Pacific wisdom. The 1999-2003 instabilities in the Solomon Islands (largely induced by Malaitan and Guadalcanal men) could perhaps have taken a leaf from that

page of how strategic relationality in leadership and influence was done in our Pacific pasts as evident across Polynesia and Micronesia. This is also a part of our indigenous knowledge and philosophy of life that could strengthen present day Pacific institutions, research and knowledge creation and justice work. Our relationships in all areas, especially in knowledge work of researching Pacific via justice lenses can take heed of. The establishing of strategic alliances must be a major part of our visioning and decolonising work moving into our futures

In the Pacific islands, this was an interesting time as indicated earlier. In Fiji, Ratu Mara had a firm hand leading the country for almost thirty (30) years first as Chief Minister and then as the country's Prime Minister. Similar stable environments appeared as well in PNG with Sir Michael Somare, and in Tonga with King Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV-whose reign lasted from December 1965 until September 2006.

In Samoa, there was Tofilau Eti and before then Tupua Tamasese Efi. We had the stable Sir Walter Lini in Vanuatu and in Cook Island, there was the eloquent Sir Albert Henry. Across the Pacific, there was a very clear relationship among leaders around Independence. The modernisation decade of the 1950's and 60's came to the Pacific late in the 1970's and beyond. Development and the beginnings of higher education institutional development almost went hand in hand most prominently in the South, with the establishment of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1968. This relationality and alliance of leaders also occurred in the church arena which led to the establishment of PTC in 1965, three years prior to USP. Most of the leaders mentioned earlier graced the USP and PTC events. Such was the climate in the '70s and 1980's, the two decades after PTC's establishment in 1965. PTC was the only degree awarding institution in the region in 1965. It began by offering a Bachelor of Divinity degree (BD) and Diploma in Divinity (see Nabobo 1996, 57-70).

In close proximity, one can say that PTC was just a stone throw away from USP.<sup>2</sup> The UNDP curriculum project which saw the decolonisation of the curriculum across the Pacific Island countries took place at USP in 1970. USP was governed for a long time via its Charter until fairly recently (see Nabobo-Baba 2008a for detail). The Charter was given by Queen Elizabeth herself. The early leaders then came via the same direction- from England or via England through New Zealand and Australia. The USP Oceania Centre was established in 1996, almost thirty years after it opened its doors. USP was evidently trying to de-

colonise. This came almost as a marker of decolonisation in an otherwise very colonial institution. Now in 2020, one can say the Oceania Centre and Pacific Studies have had some good successes currently challenged by the need to refurbish the old buildings, the remnant of the old Royal New Zealand Air Force in Laucala. This stands today in renovation while the fairly modern cousin the Japan ICT Centre<sup>3</sup> shines in its modernity. The USP has gone through a number of phases (see Nabobo 1996).

The decade after independence also saw the numerous commissions in education all pushing towards a more relevant delivery in its curriculum. The examples for instance are the 1969 Fiji Education Commission (Report 1969), the Solomon Islands Bugotu Report of 1973 Education for What? (Report 1973). And the 1969 Kiribati Tragear Education Report. All share one thing in common and that is the push for self-reliance and a curriculum offering that was relevant.

So when in 1965 PTC opened its doors like USP which opened its doors three years later, it was such an interesting time in the Pacific Is. It is against such a lively backdrop that the PTC came to being, a time when Pacific countries were visioning and “doing” decolonising. The countries were emerging out of colonial rule and other related arrangements.

### **The Pacific Theological College and Decolonisation**

The decolonising work done at PTC over the decades since the 1970's was arguably stages ahead as compared to USP for instance with the 1996 Oceania centre establishment-in my view a clear marker of this. Other institutions of higher learning have taken on decolonisation rather slowly in the Pacific; at times appearing lukewarm, at other times numb.

The agenda for decolonisation in the Pacific islands was set against the context of countries gaining independence as well as having leaders who were home grown like Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Father Walter Lini. In Papua New Guinea, interesting developments in university education also were taking place under the dominant leadership of Sir Michael Somare. His leadership spanned a number of decades like his Fijian counterpart and close friend.

With USP springing up literally on its side, the PTC was duly influenced as

scholarship began to thrive between Laucala and Veiuto. The Ecumenical movement in Europe and the influence of the World Council of Churches (WCC) added impetus to PTC's establishment and growth (Meo 1996. Cited in Nabobo 1996, 59).

Former Principal of PTC, Jovili Meo noted the importance of a critical education for the preacher, he said:

The preacher needed to be upgraded as well, as he increasingly finds an educated and more analytical Congregation plus a whole lot of other developments happening in the Pacific Islands and changing the lives of people...As society developed, the gospel needed to meet it... (Meo 1996. Cited in Nabobo 1996, 59)

Meo's comments in 1996 also point to the need for the church to keep abreast of society's developments and to address bigger issues concerning the Pacific and world. It was a world that was into two or three decades after independence and yet questions of "self-reliance and self-determination" were still important for our island countries.

Earlier in 1961, the Pacific Council of Churches' (PCC) Malua meeting with the theme "Beyond the Reef" captured the spirit and intentions of the churches and their visionary leaders to move closely together beyond the reefs of their immediate localities (Tuwere 1995).

The church was always addressing issues of the societies they served in the Pacific. In the PCC's second assembly in Suva in May, 1971, the theme: "God's purpose for God's people" expounded in a report called "The Fourth World Meets", addressed issues of self-government and decolonisation. Likewise, the third PCC assembly in the 1976 in Moresby, PNG had the theme: "God's mission in a Changing Society". In a strong push for critical thinking and decolonisation, the then Governor General of PNG, Sir John Guise while opening the Assembly said these poignant words:

Welcome to PNG. Reveal to us the Pacific Christ. Many thousands of Christians in the Pacific believe in the Christian faith, but they believe in an abstract form because Christ was not born in any of the Pacific countries; he may still be someone who does not belong to the soil of the Pacific. But the Christian faith and



Christ himself, must become a living reality in our villages, in our culture as well as in our lives...the churches must never be seen as part of the establishment, wherever and whatever that establishment may be... (report on the Third PCC Assembly 1976. Also see Nabobo 1996, 60)

During the 1970's and 1980's, PTC became almost a centre of work on decolonising theology. Carefully contextualised as "Coconut Theology", it was a move to make Christ applicable to people's lives here at home in the Pacific as per the sentiment of the Governor of PNG Sir John Guise cited above.

The fourth and fifth assemblies of the PCC in Tonga in 1981 addressed issues of "place"- these included nuclear testing and dumping of wastes, Pacific identities and cultures and development. A number of PhDs and scholarly works out of the staff and students at PTC at the time (and now increasingly so) were decolonising and contextually rooted.<sup>4</sup> An example was the thesis by the then principal of PTC, Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere (Tuwere 1992). His PhD thesis titled *Making Sense of Vanua (Land) in the Fijian Context: A Theological Exploration* was done out of the Melbourne College of Divinity.

In the 1980's and 1990's, with the overall movements towards independence in the Pacific island countries, PTC was addressing predominant issues like identity, localisation and the relevance of curriculum offered in institutions to Pacific island countries. These works at PTC were in line with and supported by similar energies at the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) which in 1981 pushed for a consultation of "Gospel and Culture". During this time, PTC students in the Masters in Theology (MTh) programs explored different, interesting topics in their theses, a number of which had Oceanic images. Such images of life such as trees and gardening, water symbolism, fanua, Vanua, and the presence of God, dust of the ground and the spirit and "gap" experience in Oceania featured heavily and framed their work. (Tuwere 1995,10).

In the decades 2000-to date, decolonising works at PTC have grown stronger and in 2020, the vision and mission of PTC and its latest Strategic Plan 2020-2025 have even gone further to ensure the church is decolonised and made relevant to Pacific peoples' realities, cultures, embracing of their philosophies of life and spiritualities. The nine institutional objectives of the newly launched Strategic Plan suggest a strong push for justice and contextual theology. Ob-

jectives Four and Five focus especially on decolonisation of the mind via a contextual Pacific island and indigenous agenda highlighting Pacific ways of knowing, indigenous philosophies and spirituality, informing bible and theological interpretations in preacher and scholarly formation and influence. I quote:

- 4.To provide quality research that nurtures and promotes theologies of justice and ways of knowing that are Pacific and contextual in nature.
5. To encourage the uniqueness of Pacific Indigenous philosophies and spirituality in informing biblical and theological interpretation and vice versa. (PTC Strategic Plan 2020,20).

As a Pacific educator with some thirty-five years of experience in Oceania, I am always attracted and affirmed by the PTC's cadre of scholars and I have said time and again in a span of almost three decades (See for example, Nabobo 1996; Nabobo-Baba 2020) that deeper decolonisation and Pacific thought and via contextual theology and justice agenda has consistently come out of PTC more than any other University or modern institution in the Pacific.

In the latest works and scholarship out of PTC, so much has been developed in terms of public debates, conferences, and presentations as well as the reaffirming of relational renaissance found in the PTC led scholarly ground breaking publications such as *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific* by editors Upolu Lumā Vaai (the current Principal of PTC) and Nabobo- Baba 2017 and *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi* by editors Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira (2017). Another major ground breaking development was the first ever indigenous philosophies conference co-convened by PTC, USP, FNU, and the major Pacific NGO umbrella PIANGO in June 2018 in Suva, Fiji.

### **Possible Futures of PTC – of Being and Becoming – a personal observation on the celebration and boosting of Pacific knowledge systems and Pacific decolonised research frameworks**

There has been a number of works done by Pacific islanders and others on the decolonising of Pacific research frameworks. The seminal work by Konai Helu Thaman on Kakala research framework was first introduced in 1992. Then there is the Kaupapa Maori Research Framework by Graeme and Linda Smith



in the 1990's, Linda Smith's work in 1999 [2013], which was a part of what was termed as the Maori Renaissance in New Zealand. My own Fijian Vanua Research Framework borrowed and was influenced heavily from these decolonising frameworks, as well as works before it by Fijian scholars on Vanua-most profound among these were Ilaitia Tuwere (2002) and Ratu Semi Seruvakula (2000). There are others as well like Professors Tupeni L Baba and the late Professor Asesela Ravuvu whose works paved the way as well for some of my earlier thinking on work around decolonizing knowledge and education.

As I examine therefore the important role an institution like PTC can play moving into a future that strategically centres "the Pacific" in its delivery, it is in its content and overall mission, vision and philosophy, as well as in its research strategy. This could be via an emergent Pacific School of Thought focusing on indigenous research and thought and also those in hybridity and evolving.

An overview of all works on decolonising research methodologies in the Pacific islands has been summarised by Koya Vakauta (2017) and a similar detailed work on the same is currently in production (Nabobo-Baba et.al forthcoming). For PTC, a selection of work on decolonising research and centring Pacific ways of knowing in the last three years has been identified by Va'ai (2019).

## Conclusion

This article has intimated that the future of the decolonising of Pacific institutions of higher learning and universities like PTC has begun well. The article has also intimated that the independence movements also brought in its own ray of decolonisation. PTC in a span of some five decades has been doing such decolonising work consistently. Moving into the future, the latest 55th Anniversary celebrations at the PTC in Suva (March, 2020), saw the acknowledgment of the people of Suva and Tui Suva, the first of its kind for the Tui Suva by the church. It was done with appropriate decorum and respect. The ceremony accorded to the Tui Suva and his people sought forgiveness for all past wrongs done on his people by the Church as well as others for the way their land was encroached upon and the way their people and their issues of alienation were not treated with justice. This is the restorative justice that makes the Creator happy as in Isaiah 42: 1-9 (See Barker 1999, 1014). This is also the essence of the new PTC Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Furthermore, the publications, conferences, and thesis work as well as involvement by PTC in the future has real promise if the

latest six year strategic plan and its current leadership are markers to go by.

The time for PTC is in the now. It can possibly carve itself to be the first real institution/university in Oceania that puts real credibility and meaning to the studies of the peoples of the Pacific, including knowledge systems, and philosophies and spiritualities of our blue continent. What this means is that for the first time the philosophies, cultures, arts and heritages of our peoples, the education of our peoples, and the theorising of our research and framings will be about Pacific and for Pacific, is championed by a Pacific institution of higher learning. This is a complete take off from rather subdued versions of the same in other universities and institutions of higher learning and research in the Pacific that can be observed for some time.

While there have been similar movements on decolonising Pacific, like the Rethinking Pacific Education Movement (1999-to date), institutional commitment has been varied and sporadic. Sometimes this is muted, at other times such injustice on Pacific knowledge systems had been propagated supposedly because other knowledges and research framings were deemed more important and applicable to Quartile1 journals. Such belittlement, ignorance and lack of critical thinking and unchecked development paradigms have been put to test by the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen calls for a more nature based and ecological justice and the propagation of time tested Pacific values of respect for the ecology of life and balance.

In the world we live in, Pacific students learning over almost a century now about Foucault, Durkheim, Deluze, Spivak and Shakespeare, the PTC has now the potential to establish the long-awaited Pacific School of Thought that celebrate and teach about the best of us! These schools will also do the globalisation of Pacific indigenous ideas, knowledge, wisdoms and research framings that respect and include what is Pacific. This may also include transporting, exporting Pacific scholarship, and Pacific thought leaders' ideas to the world-as in the "Empire speaks and writes back"!

The next five or six years will be a time of our becoming! Ho'oulu (Meyer 2003) and Sautu (Nabobo-Baba 2006)!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Islands: here includes what is today the Free Pacific –and excludes the American Pacific - American Samoa, and the Northern Pacific. It also excludes French New Caledonia and Tahiti.

<sup>2</sup> I discuss the USP here because the two institutions not only are geographically close- they have influenced each other for some time -perhaps this is not always highlighted. Scholars moved between the institutions in Fiji and these two especially.

<sup>3</sup> Tuesday 6th July 2010, H.E. Mr. Yutaka Yoshizawa, Ambassador of Japan to Fiji officially opened the newest, modern and great Information and Communication Technology Centre funded by Government of Japan at the University of the South Pacific (USP). The Government of Japan donated JP\ 2.2 billion (approx. F\$45 million) for the Phase I works which included constructions of two buildings with facilities consisting of computer laboratories, conference rooms and specialized equipment. Retrieved from: <https://www.jica.go.jp/fiji/english/activities/grantaid01.html> page. 1

<sup>4</sup> This was a time when the Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group (FANG) and other like- minded NGOs sprung up in the PICs. The Black Brothers band was also on tour in the Pacific Is in a bid to free the then Irian Jaya (given by Indonesia)– today’s West Papua-the fight continues today.

## Reference

Baba, T. 1991. “Education in the Small Island States of the South Pacific: The Changing Role of the School and Its Implications for Higher Education”. In *Explorations in Higher Education: A South Pacific Critique*. Edited by D. R. Jones, V. L. Meek and J. Weeks. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

Barker, K. et al (eds). 1999. *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. Education for Modern Fiji: Report of the Fiji Education Commission, 1969.

Hindson, C. 1982. “Kiribati: The Search For Educational Direction in a Pacific Context”. *Directions*.9: 1-11 Retrieved from: [usp.ac.fj/collect/direct/index/assoc/D769874.dir/doc.pdf](http://usp.ac.fj/collect/direct/index/assoc/D769874.dir/doc.pdf)

Koya, Cresantia F. 2017. “Rethinking Research as Relational Space in the Pacific:

Pedagogy and Praxis”. In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: USP.

Koya, Cresantia F. 2017. “Rethinking Research as Relational Space in the Pacific: Pedagogy and Praxis”. In *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Edited by Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira. Suva: USP.

Meyer, Manulani. 2003. *Ho’oulu: Our Time of our Becoming*. Honolulu. Hawai‘i: ‘Ai Pōhaku Press.

Nabobo, U. 1996. *A Century of Higher Education in Fiji*. MAEd Thesis. Suva: USP.

Nabobo-Baba, U. (2006). *Knowing and learning. A Fijian Approach*. Suva: USP Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2008a. “Global and Local Intersections: The Academy and the spaces within for Indigenous Knowledges and Research-the case of the University of the South Pacific”. In *Pacific Education: Issues and Perspectives*. Edited by J. Dorovolomo, F. Koya-Vakauta, H. Phan, J. Veramu and U. Nabobo-Baba, Suva: USP.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2008b. “Decolonizing Framings in Pacific Research: Indigenous Fijian Vanua Research Framework as an organic response”. *Alternative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. 4(2): 141-154.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2020. “Congratulatory Note to the PTC-Building: Our Pacific Higher Education Futures and Alliances-together we will prevail”. An Invited Address to the PTC community on the Occasion of the celebration and launch of its fifty-fifth Anniversary Celebrations. PTC Mission Centre, Veiuto, Suva. 16 March 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_. et al. Forthcoming. *Decolonizing & Indigenous Pacific Research Methodologies -A Treaty of sorts to our Lives in the Blue Continent*.

Pacific Theological College. 2020. *Towards Excellence in Theological Education for Leadership for Justice*. PTC Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Suva: PTC. Saunders, G.E. 2010. *Education in the Solomon Islands*. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487709556111>

Seruvakula, S. 2000. *Bula Vakavanua*. Suva: USP.



Theological Education Fund of the IMC. 1961. *Theological Education in the Pacific*. A Consultation Sponsored by the Theological Education Fund of the IMC, Dudley House High School, Suva, Fiji, 7-13 May 1961.

Theological Education Reports in the Pacific. May, 1961. London: TEF.

Tuwere, I.S. 1983. "Pacific Theological College: Background Paper". In *USP Regional Conference on Future Directions of the USP – Report*. Vol. 2: 156-157.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "The Theological Colleges". *Pacific Universities: Achievements, problems and prospects*. Edited by R. Crocombe and M. Meleisea. Suva: IPS, USP.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1995. "An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania". In *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, No. 13: 14.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Vanua: A Fijian Theology of Place*. Suva: USP.

University of the South Pacific. 1984. *Report of the Regional Conference on Future Directions for the University of the South Pacific*. Vol I & II. Suva: USP

\_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *A Garland of Achievement*. Suva: USP.

Vaái, U. 2019. "Decolonising Pacific Indigenous Research Framings: A Selection from the last three years at the Pacific Theological College". Seminar Paper. The DelaiNatabua Na Vuku Seminar Series. FNU: Lautoka Campus.

Vaai, Upolu Luma and Aisake Casimira (eds). 2017. *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

Vaai, Upolu Luma and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (eds). 2017. *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College.

Whitehead, C. 1975. *Education in Fiji*. PhD Thesis. New Zealand: University of Otago.

## BOOK REVIEW

### In pursuit of a Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics

A Review of *Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women* (2003)  
by Jione Havea

*Dr Fatilua Fatilua*

*Fatilua is a Lecturer of New Testament and Hellenistic Greek  
in the Department of Biblical Studies at PTC.*

In pursuit of a Pacific Island Biblical hermeneutics, one always has to navigate the labyrinth of issues and questions that come with it. For the new Pacific Island student in biblical studies in particular, the task looms insurmountable. Where does one start? For much like the vast Pacific Ocean—rich depth, mysterious, profound, unfathomable—it is not an easy feat, nor an enviable task.

#### A transoceanic experience

A good start is with Jione Havea who, strictly from a biblical studies perspective, probably took the first stab in terms of academic publication. In his seminal monograph, *Elusions of Control* (2003) Havea foregrounds his transoceanic experience showcasing the “boundary-crossing tendencies” of transoceanic readers (3). The experience of a Pacific Islander, of Tongan descent, surrounded by limited land-space, colored his examination of regulations concerning women’s vows in Numbers 30. Examining the impact of regulations on divorcees and



widows, Havea juxtaposes these against the backdrop of images and metaphors from his transoceanic experience. The outcome is a creative innovation, interweaving nuances of island life and Havea's exegetical prowess. Not only delivering an acute and profound sense of distinctiveness *Elusions* illuminates diligence in engaging the text.

A prominent feature of *Elusions* is how Havea cleverly navigates between the cacophony of Pacific Island voices and his heritage as a Tongan. In doing so, Havea exposes the daunting task facing scholars of Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics. How can one undertake Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics in a region that is culturally rich and diverse? To claim such a distinction—Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics—is tantamount to reducing all of Oceania with its vibrant wealth of indigenous knowledge system, history, language, and belief into some grandiose strand. Such a claim also suggests singularity and uniformity in the region, which is far from the truth. This is not to discredit centuries of migration and trading between and among the Pacific Island people. What I am simply pointing out is one of the misconceptions that flawed many claims to universality at the expense of individuality.

Havea appears cognizant of this as he skillfully mixes in symbols of his individuality, situated within a larger and broader framework of Pacific Island-ness. As an example, he prioritizes the oceanic orientation and social location of Pacific Islanders declaring that “south pacific islanders are oriented toward the ocean”. The ocean is “our island boundary, albeit a fluid boundary, and an extension of our land.” It is a source of life as “Into the ocean we search for food” (4).

By situating himself as a Pacific Islander, Havea highlights the free flowing, fluidity of the text enabling the exegete to cross boundaries and find spaces that are otherwise difficult to attain. Islands and oceans are connected. As he adds, “the boundary (ocean) that links texts (islands), the fluid expanse in between texts, in/through which readers are encouraged to cross playfully but calmly.” In this manner, the boundary “is a stepping stone, a medium, a conduit, real (textual) and/or imaginary (ideological), that enables the reader to leap from one text to another” (5).

Within this larger framework, Havea weaves his individuality, his Tongan heritage. By interspersing Tongan phrases and concepts throughout, Havea juxtaposes his individuality within the larger framework of Pacific Island readers,

all the while engaging with the text. For example, when Havea talks about gaps and dips in the text of Numbers 30, he draws from the Tongan “*ma’ahi*” (wake) and “*matua*” (gap), Tongan semantics concerning ocean waves. The outcome underscores a strong degree of distinctiveness, yet, captures a broader Pacific Island flavor. Moreover, the Pacific Island reader is appropriated ownership and a feeling of belonging to an otherwise imported text emerges. In this way, the coupling of historiography, narrative, legal, ideology, and transoceanic leanings (43) allows for an interesting mix, a creative and innovative way of reading the biblical text from the perspective of Pacific Island readers.

### A method of reading

As a method of reading, Havea appears to frame and anchor everything upon his transoceanic leanings and social location. The undergirding element of this is to emphasize the fluidity in the text allowing space for the reader’s imagination and creativity. The sole focus appears to be on the interaction between the text and the reader, giving space and value to the reader’s perception, the world of the reader. It is not to say that Havea situates meaning primarily with the reader. In practice, Havea recognizes that he can only start with the text (16). In this manner he situates himself “in between, inter- esse, with the texts of Num 30, and interested”, meaning the readers. Then in the following section, Havea engages in textual criticism, situating Numbers 30 within its textual limits (18). By all appearances, Havea shows how transoceanic leanings are employed to allow for space to move between the context of the text and one’s social location as a Pacific Island reader.

*Elusions* navigates the text in five segments, all relating to island life. The first segment is called “mapping the turf” a circumreading of the text which highlights some of “transoceanic leanings” and echoes of Derrida’s circumfession (1). As Havea writes, “circumreading urges readers toward the embrace of the Other, always particular and already disclosed. It resists inflexible representations in order to account for the complexity of the around-and-across relations of texts. Circumreading is, in that regard, transgressive” (2-3).

Next, Havea uses “watering the turf” to refer to transtextuality which reflects the “cross-boundary” transoceanic perspectives of islanders (3). It “represents the meeting, the crossing, or intertextuality with transoceanic perspectives” to encourage what he calls “transformative and transdisciplinary reading” (3, foot-

note 11). For Havea, intertextuality is concerned with both “crossing between texts and the crossing of texts”. Crossing between texts sees the text as disconnected or having space in between while the crossing of texts sees them “intersecting, crossing, a part of, each other” (4). In this regard, it conveys a sense of looking for both differences and similarities in the text. Moreover, central to transtextuality is the reader’s own imagination. Transtextuality “places the weight of the reading practices on the shoulders of the reader’s imagination, at once reader-responsive and reader constructing” (5).

Havea also talks about dipping into the surf (6). The island reader “rides up the wake (*ma’ahi* in Tongan) and down the gap (*matua*), while looking out for breaking waves, to face the wake behind the gap” (6). From a transoceanic view, Havea draws parallel to transtextuality accounts for “dominant subjects (main points, wakes) and ignored and repressed subjects (the marginalized, gaps) in biblical texts” (6). Havea further states that “In the end, the transoceanic reader realizes that she can neither control nor duplicate the text. Nor can its boundaries (ocean)! Nonetheless, the reader disturbs the text (by crossing and harvesting it) and then she must let the text be” (7). Moreover, “transtextuality, therefore, also participates in the illusion and elusion of control” (7).

The fifth and final segment is overturning the surfs. He again starts with a transoceanic realization of the wave disturbances precipitated by the underside of the waves. From this transoceanic leaning, Havea draws two undercurrents of transtextuality “the affects (agency) and elusiveness of the Other” (8).

Showing astuteness and a great sense of responsibility, Havea recognizes that just with any methodology, this he calls transtextuality, there are limits. A primary concern of transtextuality is the question of how to capture the “text and/or materialize its undersides” (8). To this question Havea responds that it is upon the “shoulders of the reader’s imagination” (8). Since what may exist in one’s imagination “may be absent or insignificant” in the imagination of others, “transtextual readers have a chance to resist other readings and, consequently, to free the text from readers’ control” (9). In this manner, “transtextuality is a disarming practice that arms the reader while she anticipates the next departure (on/to the next text and reading)” (9).

It is noteworthy to revisit an earlier suggestion regarding the question of where meaning is located. For Havea, it appears that his transoceanic leanings express

the multivalent manner in which he deals with the text. While he foregrounds his indigenous leanings, and his social location, Havea shows to a certain degree his persistence to work with the text from other perspectives including the historical critical perspective. This is evident in the analysis which begins by sifting through the text of Numbers 30 to identify the “dominant subjects” (16). The specific attention to textual evidence focusing on a translation of the Masoretic Text (BHS) and a preference for the Masoretic text is induced by “transoceanic reasons” (18) that find the “playfulness” and “variances” in the text appealing (16). These “disharmonies open the text for interpretation and hold back readers’ control” (18). In this sense, Havea draws from transoceanic leanings to characterize the need to maintain fluidity of the text, but also with a certain sense of responsibility, avoiding reader biases. In this manner, the analysis straddles a fine balance between the world of the text and the world of the modern-day reader. Such a balance though is difficult to maintain and continues to be a challenge in biblical hermeneutics.

## **Transtextuality**

Havea’s use of transtextuality has some similarities to Vernon Robbins’ (1996) scheme using the intertexture of the text in a sociorhetorical inquiry. The crossing point they share in my view is in the act of finding connections, or spaces for connections, between texts, and within texts. Perhaps an even stronger parallel, transtextuality also resonates with the Samoan concept of *talalasi* which Mosese Ma’ilo (2018) defines as big telling or telling big. This, Ma’ilo cleverly weaves into his re-appropriation of the biblical Prodigal Son rendering a Pacific Island perspective. Crossing this biblical narrative and Albert Wendts’ *Sons for the Return home*, Ma’ilo highlights the challenges facing Samoans in the Diaspora and the search for identity. The common denominator shared with *Elusions*, is in finding narratives, stories or texts to cross with the intent of providing alternative and transformative reading. One could argue that the point of crossing or where the intersection takes place is debatable. The strength however as shown by Havea in crossing of stories and narratives is it allows for re-appropriating the distinctiveness of the text to fit the needs of the contemporary context. Much like the Pacific Island reader who is oriented towards the Ocean, the text is as fluid and as such prone to border- crossing. This is an exciting and innovative way of bridging the gap between the biblical text and the context of the Pacific Island reader. Be that as it may, the challenge remains though for the need to intersect responsibility. Much like in Oceania that is surrounded by

the vast Pacific Ocean, the difficulty is in allowing the fluidity of reading while also maintaining a degree of responsibility to the text, to ourselves and to the readers. This is a common thread throughout much of the biblical scholarship.

## **Liberative**

The strong liberative flavor of *Elusions* is intriguing. For example, the frequent use of “underside,”<sup>1</sup> which suggests something hidden, something below surface level, but causing disturbances. This, Havea skillfully weaves into the reading with the help of the Tongan phrase “*ngalu fakaofa*” signaling the unexpected breaking of waves caused by some disturbances triggered at the underside of the wave (7). The resulting insight is fascinating as Havea later admits that a “liberation praxis” surges as the underside current. This is an important matter given that perhaps the Pacific is arguably the last region in the world that has yet to develop some form of liberation theology.

## **Transformative and Transdisciplinary**

Finally, the two dimensions that occupy the underside of Havea’s transtextuality reading cannot be ignored. Transtextuality according to Havea is both transformative<sup>2</sup> and transdisciplinary<sup>3</sup> (3, ftne 11), a reference not only to the capacity to cross boundaries but also to transform the reader. In the process of reading, the text and the reader are both transformed. The resulting outcome becomes the starting point for the next sphere of engagement. It is here that I venture to make the claim that Havea is perhaps suggesting the need to ground our hermeneutical reading in the contemporary context, integrating our interpretative conversation with real-life situations. Although this is not explicit, I would like to think however that Havea is on to something here. By insisting and perpetuating on a transformative element in biblical reading, the resulting outcome is an important pointer for biblical hermeneutics in the Pacific region—the need to ground our reading and interpretation in real-life issues. A great need exists to bridge the Bible with issues and challenges in the region. In this case, Havea’s thought-provoking reading of Numbers 30 and the issues confronting women causes the Oceanic reader, at the very least in this case myself, to pause and rethink, reflecting on the role and status of women within the different Pacific cultures. Women, for example in my Samoan culture, have a special role and function. Havea’s reading of Numbers 30 clearly resonates with much of the evidence that suggest women are not treated fairly, whether it be in the work-

place, at home, or within society at large. In this manner, using the analogy of a fishing canoe, this is the mooring point upon which Havea's work on Numbers 30 finds anchorage. The treatment of women in the society is an issue that is very much part of the social fabric of society in the Pacific Islands and throughout Oceania.

### Universal characterization

A final consideration concerns a universal characterization of Pacific Island readers. While one may argue that Havea's characterization of Pacific Islanders as people oriented towards the ocean minimizes the experience of someone living on the highlands in Papua New Guinea or in the heartlands of Australia, I would add though the understanding that Pacific Island people are surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean, to a certain degree, reflects much of life in the region. In this regard, Havea's characterization of Pacific Islanders as ocean oriented to a large extent captures the experience of most Pacific Islanders.

What this reveals, as already mentioned above, is the difficulty in any attempt to claim any distinction for Pacific Island biblical hermeneutics within the richly diverse and broader context of the Oceania. The pursuit for Pacific Island Biblical hermeneutics finds one at a crossroads between universality on one hand and individuality on the other. For the learning student setting out on this journey, *Elusions* paves the way forward.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In my search for the meaning of underside I find that it is frequently used in liberation theology scholarship. According to Harvey Cox (1989, 386), Gustavo Gutierrez also coined the phrase "underside" although it was in connection to the phrase "underside of history". Nevertheless, I find the term has a deep connection to liberation theology which raises the question whether this could be evidence that Havea is grounded in liberation theology. If so, one must ponder the implications for the developing biblical hermeneutic scholarship in the Pacific region.

<sup>2</sup> I carried out a search of the word and find that it emphasizes connections between the biblical text as the word of God and its contemporary significance (Hardin 2012).

<sup>3</sup> This suggests the cross boundary, fluid and flowing nature of transtextuality which allows the reader to cross stories that may have not at all seem related.



## References

Cox, Harvey. 1989. "Theology from the underside". *CrossCurrents*. 39 (4): 385-390.

Hardin, Leslie T. 2012. "Searching for a Transformative Hermeneutic". *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*. 5 (1): 144-157.

Havea, Jione. 2003. *Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Ma'ilo, Mosese. 2018. "Island Prodigals: Encircling the Void in Luke 15:11-32". In *Sea of Readings: the Bible in the South Pacific*. Edited by Jione Havea. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

Robbins, Vernon K. 1996. *Exploring the texture of the texts: a guide to socio-rhetorical interpretations*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

---

## BOOK REVIEW

**Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit Toward a Theology of Work***

*Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001 / 1-57910-641-2  
/ approx. vii + 252pp.*

***Rev. Ioelu Onesemo***

*Onesemo is a doctoral candidate in the department of  
Theology & Ethics at PTC.*

*Work in the Spirit* is an exciting new direction for rethinking an orientation for a theology of work at the same time complement reputation the author holds in the advancement of the new genre ‘theology of work’ as coined by Catholic theologians in the mid-twentieth century. The *Christianity Today* magazine (February Issue 1999, 30-31) an article by Tim Stafford entitled “The New Theologians” cites Miroslav Volf (Yale University), Richard Hays (Duke University), Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Trinity Evangelical Divinity), N. T. Wright (Lichfield Cathedral Staffordshire) and Ellen Chary (Princeton University) as evidence of biblical and theological reflections articulating unapologetically orthodox faith. For one thing, they’re bold enough to reclaim classical, conservative religious themes in new and creative ways. Stafford implies ‘new’ fit as they’re not only replacing the older generation of Bible and theology thinkers in top academic institutions, but also as new voices to past issues. Volf, a former student of Jürgen Moltmann, who in *Theology of Hop* showed how Christian faith is thoroughly eschatological and thus always relates to new creation, inspires Volf’s escha-

tological and pneumatological framework of work. Volf boldly acts on shifting the starting point for a theology of work from the established protology of work (initial creation perspective) to pneumatology and eschatology. He argues that a Genesis protological framework is not inadequate because it is not comprehensive enough and not dynamic for the increasing mobility of the present world of work—holding multiple jobs and frequently changing situations. His dissatisfaction with past theologians moved the paradigm shift of theology of work and what he describes as a static immaterial concept of vocation (calling summons by God) in the Protestant work ethic in the rise and development of capitalism. As well as Martin Luther’s biblical misinterpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:20 with the notion of work restricting vocation to one immutable spiritual calling, one immutable physical calling is indifferent to alienation. Therefore, it requires a new voice, a comprehensive (related to all reality) contemporary theology of work for a contemporary world of work.

The central thesis of the book understands the “Spirit of God calls and gifts people to work in active anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world.” (123) Volf advocates Christian work as a gift of the Spirit of God and done in cooperation with God in their development and eschatological transformation of the present creation, not a vocation. The proposed theological framework is the dynamic concept of *charisms* (gifts of the Spirit) in the broader context of the eschatological idea of the new creation. An extensive explanation and justification of an eschatological theology of work were few and far between. Volf hints his “rather terse” eschatology is a rough draft, an open invitation for other thinkers to develop eschatological implications of the theology of work for present realities of work. Charism is related to specific tasks God calls and fits each Christian to influence work inside and outside of the Church. The Spirit gifts inspiration not only to perform tasks but also to accomplish a task. Charisms are not limited to clerical work and Christian fellowship but have a global character and inclusive relations. The relation of Christian work to the Church is Volf’s model for a pneumatological understanding of all types of work—Christian and non-Christian.

*Work in the Spirit* can be divided into three sections, (1) analysis of the contemporary world of work, (2) a pneumatology theology of work, and (3) application of a pneumatological Christian theology of work. Generally, analysis of the contemporary world of work seeks to understand and define characters and roles of work concerning human activities (in robust economies and developed societies)

on the strength of Adam Smith and Karl Marx as the dominant understanding of present work. The goal is critical reflections on current realities (transformation and crisis of work) of mundane work to construct a meaningful and relevant theology of work. Importantly, unresolved problems (i.e., ecological turmoil, dehumanization, alienation), and causes (personal, structural, technological) of the issues of work a Christian theology needs to make right. Furthermore, the pneumatological understanding of work pleads for a theology of work, not an ethic of work, also open to a redefinition of work. Volf starts with reshaping traditional reflections to suit the present world of work. It must be a comprehensive theology established with a “synthetic theological vision” using biblical, theological, anthropological, and other disciplines’ reflection on work as cooperation with God in the anticipated eschatological *transformatio mundi*—continuity between the present creation and the new creation. (viii) With the eschatological *transformatio mundi* model, the intrinsic value of work is appealing, and mundane work is invaluable. Likewise, acquire dogmatic perspectives to reflect and interpret the meaning of work cooperating in the history of God’s worldly engagements. Volf is adamant that being without the experience of the Spirit of God is being without the experience of the new creation. Lastly, the application of a pneumatological understanding of work gives credence to alienating work. Volf clothes alienation as “significant discrepancy” between the presumed natures of work and how work should be. (157) This significant discrepancy is the result of the inversion in ‘means’ and ‘ends’ of work. Volf lays claims that people in the modern economy see work as mere means. Alienation takes on many forms in all types of work, Volf focalizes on industrial and information jobs. And assumes his analysis and pneumatological reflection on work in the industry, management, and technology applies to any work. To address dissociated relations caused by alienating work, humanization of work is of great consequence, transforming work to the way God intended it to be. Work relates to human nature, fundamental to human existence and an aspect of the purpose of life itself (to keep alive, to think, to worship).

Despite the enjoyable insights contributing to understanding mundane work as *Work in the Spirit* of God, the reading is a good view of Christian faith and work, on top of empowerment of capitalism and communism, defense of market economy, technology, human freedom, and development. Volf’s discussion of mundane work in light of charisms and the Spirit of God is helpful, but to incarcerate the many-facet presence of the Spirit of God to charisms and employment is inquiring and perhaps overly narrow. Volf gives the impression the Spirit

of God and charisms in employment is a liability, accountable for all human acts in work, good and bad. He alludes to the Spirit of God as a rational tool of mere means to create and to meet anticipated ends, when it should be an asset, an unconditional source of power and presence, wisdom to advise, and teaches us how to act in the image of God in everyday human work acknowledging human freedom. Some people are obliged to work due to conditions and realities, not charisms, in fact, human and sex trafficking, drugs, child labor are seamy sides of present industries (i.e., technology, mining, tourism, pharmaceutical, construction, entertainment). Volf puts the accent on the reader to concentrate wholly on the overall picture the primary purpose of the book a “new synthetic theological human vision of work,” not the details. (x) Also, the reader who disagrees with his theological constructs can build on his proposed pneumatological and eschatological foundation for a theology of work.

There are three challenges for Volf’s pneumatological foundation for a comprehensive contemporary theology of work that might require further expositions for other scholars to consider. First, why and wherefore of Volf’s paradigm shift to a charismatic interpretation of work is curious and vague. Work is stamped as employment interchangeably with Christian practice. Volf implies work points to “what characteristics an activity (human) must have in order to be considered work, and what features differentiate work from other activities.” (10) Furthermore, work is a transformative and an instrumental activity to satisfy the needs of working individuals and ‘co-creatures’ (society and nature). Volf’s insight of a redefinition of work is relevant; on the contrary, it needs a deep-rooted meaning that is genuine in praxis to all realities, not only pen and paper. Volf understands *Work in the Spirit* in light of the new creation human work cannot increase the worth and dignity of human beings despite that household chore is oppressive. His theology might affirm the eternal value of noble work, but little help to other situations and contexts, for instance, the marginalized. Volf agrees to commit to a comprehensive and normative understanding of work, yet fails to develop an all-inclusive definition and global character of work. A ‘might be’ redefinition of work building on Volf’s interpretation is an honest, purposeful and methodologically relational activity to human beings (inner and outer person), to others (individuals, society), to nature and God whose principal goal is to maintain and preserve life through mutuality and God-like-love.

Second, ‘why’ eschatology and ‘why’ pneumatology Volf extensively and acutely argued the necessity as the departure for a theology of work. The

question ‘why’ is still without a concrete and practical solution to present realities of work. Why not Christology? Why not a Trinitarian foundation for a theology of work? Isn’t a Trinitarian orientation collective and multifaceted? *Work in the Spirit* reminds us of cooperation with God, and eschatological realism is the ultimate goal of Christian faith and life. At the same time, aren’t we too far ahead that we wittingly misuse the Spirit and the eschatological hope to clothe self-interest anew? Aren’t we too forward-thinking heedful of anticipatory ends neglecting extremity of relationality and present realities? Volf purposefully and uniformly exploits the relational value of work, including relation to eschatological judgment. The books titled *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996) and *After Our Likeness* (1998) by Volf, attest to a Trinitarian foundation for identity, embracing otherness, and divine-self-love-giving. Pivotal is mutuality, and God-like-love is the essence and quest in life. Complete self-giving and complete self-presence of the other, mutual giving and mutual receiving of the other is the basis to understanding everyday human work, solutions to problems of work, and grounds for charisms to shine. Without mutuality, being apart from the other is elation to evil. “True humanity is realized only when people live with one another in such a way that they do not live against one another or simply next to one another, but for one another.” (191) Having said that, as a Christian, I applaud Volf bringing to attention how essential and important eschatology is as an asset to ethics and theology of work.

Finally, Volf champions the eschatological *transformatio mundi* because it is dynamically applicable and meaningful to the contemporary world of work. He places Christian work in the context of eschatological realism, as reflected in the eschatological nature of the New Testament and hope in the Old Testament. Related to this is the intrinsic value of noble works in the continuity and discontinuity of present cooperation with God to the new creation or new heaven. Even though it’s excessively complemented, gentle, and narrow accounts of biblical accounts of work, it’s enough for his insights of repurposing work as part of God’s *continua creatio* (ongoing creation) in the light of eschatological *transformatio mundi*. Can human work truly transform the world-creation? Volf recognizes that Christian faith and work should stand in the service of the new creation, and the new creation is not the result of human action, but God alone. In the present realities of the world, especially COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, capitalism and communism are mystified, relationships put to the sword, technology proven it’s valued, but a favorable space for Creation, self-restoration and self-healing as observed. Apparently, amid present realities, human beings



through work cannot transform current creation (nature) or a new creation. Still, all reaffirms human beings can only maintain and preserve life through creating and transforming relations in self-being, to other individuals, to society, to Creation and God. The essence of human work can only be viewed as maintenance and preservation of life through mutuality and God-like-love. An eschatological *transformatio mundi* to be practical and comprehensively meaningful in the present, a Trinitarian theological framework is fundamental and might be a reasonable starting point.

To put it in a nutshell, all insights committing to the thesis of *Work in the Spirit* is an inspiring, dynamic, thought-provoking, relevant philosophical, biblical, and theological reading of a theology of work. And should be commended for raising awareness of the contemporary problems of work and reminding us of the importance of the presence and the enabling transformative power of the Spirit of God in our contexts. Chiefly, this is a relevant reading and an excellent technical resource for universities and divinity academic posts. I wish a simplified version would be available for anyone and for us who protest technical texts.

---

## Information for Contributors

### Policy Statement

The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS). It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the journal are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or SPATS and its constituent bodies, nor of associations with which the authors are affiliated.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing that express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

- ◇ original articles in the theological disciplines
- ◇ articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues and other academic disciplines
- ◇ helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational)
- ◇ artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music)
- ◇ notes and reviews of books that are relevant for Pacific Christians
- ◇ information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.

*Guidelines for Authors:* The Editorial Board will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of the journal. Articles in English, French or Pacific languages will be considered. Poetry, photographs and black and white drawings are also welcome. Manuscripts must be previously unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

*Review policy:* Criteria for Acceptance: Following initial screening, papers are reviewed by two or more board members, using these criteria:

- Relevance and/or currency of interest to the Pacific Islands.
- Contribution to current debates.
- Originality, balance, scholarship.
- Argument, organization and presentation.

The final decision to publish is retained by the Editor and the Editorial Board, who may also suggest editorial changes for all articles submitted for publication.

*Submissions:* addressed to the Editor, PJT, (see SPATS contact address, inside front cover), must comply with the following requirements:

*Maximum length:* 6000 words (book reviews 1000 words) including notes Style: Australian Government Publishing Service, Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers, 5th edn; or the 6th edn revised by Snooks & Co. and published by Wiley in 2002.

*Spelling:* British (not American) spelling is preferred. Follows the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

*Notes:* In the manuscript, all notes, commencing on a new page, must be double-spaced end- (and not foot- ) notes. Notes should be substantive only not documentation. In the text, the identifier, if in superscript, should be outside the punctuation, like this:<sup>1</sup> If you use the Insert, Notes facility, the program will superscript for you. If you prefer to construct your list of notes manually, you will have to set the identifiers manually too. Alternatively, you may just indicate it in parentheses, thus: (1) In his case, you will have to construct your list of notes manually.

*Author and date referencing in text* (surname date:page) e.g. at the end of a clause or sentence, (Ernst 1994:8); or, within a sentence, 'Little (1996:212) notes that.....'

*Reference list:* commencing on a new page, of all (and only) cited references listed alphabetically by author and, within author, by date, title and publisher. Use italics for book and journal titles, single inverted commas and minimal capitalisation for article titles, and no markings for presented papers or unpublished texts. Chapters and articles should show page numbers.

See Style. e.g.:

**Ernst, Manfred, 1994, *Winds of Change: rapidly growing religious groups in the Pacific Islands*, Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva.**

**Little, Jeanette, 1996, '... and wife: Mary Kaaialii Kahelemauna Nawaa, missionary wife and missionary', in *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific*, eds Doug Munro & Andrew Thornley, Pacific Theological College & Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, pp. 210–34.**

*Cover page:* A separate cover page must include: title, author's name, affiliation, postal, fax and e-mail addresses, and a list of any maps, figures etc. accompanying the text.

Please include brief biographical data and a head-and-shoulders photo of the author, with any necessary information about the paper, e.g. details of where it was presented, in the case of a conference paper.

*Maps, Tables, Diagrams, Graphs, Photographs:* Indicate location in text and include the electronic copy for the material at the end of the file, each on a separate page; or in separate files; or submit camera ready copies on separate pages. Publication will be b & w. Any necessary attribution notes and copyright clearances are author's responsibility.

*Computer processing:* MS Word preferred.

*Format:* A4 paper, double or 1½ spacing, 5cm spaces all margins, font 11 or 12

point Times Roman, left aligned; all pages numbered sequentially at bottom of pages.

*Minimal formatting:* Italics (or marked by underlining) may be shown where appropriate. Subheads: Bold, left aligned, minimal capitalisation.

*Subsubheads:* Italics, left aligned, minimal caps. A lot of formatting will have to change in the final layout so the less you put in the better.

*Electronic Submission:* E-mail attachments addressed to the editor at the SPATS e-address are the fastest. A 3.5" diskette or CD-ROM is also acceptable. The electronic file must contain all files relevant to the manuscript. If hard copy is submitted, it is helpful to provide an electronic file as well.



# South Pacific Association of Theological Schools

*P. O. Box 2426, Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji*  
Tel. (679) 330-3924 Email: [info@spats.org.fj](mailto:info@spats.org.fj) or [admin@spats.org.fj](mailto:admin@spats.org.fj)

President: Rev. Dr Moreli Niuatua  
General Secretary: Rev. Rusiate T. Tuidrakulu  
Chair, Pacific Journal of Theology: Tessa MacKenzie  
Weavers Co-ordinator: Kaliti Mate  
Administrative Assistant: Makereta Lasike

Vice President: Rev. Dr Jolame Lasawa  
Chair, Accreditation: Rev. Dr Mosese Ma'ilo  
Financial Advisor/Treasurer: Livai Tuisaravere  
Financial Assistant: Anaseini Leba

## Member Schools

**Bishop Patteson Theological College**  
PO Box 19, Honiara, Solomon Islands

**Ecole Pastorale de Bethania**  
Xepenehe, Lifou, New Caledonia

**Fiji College of Theology & Evangelism**  
PO Box 315, Lautoka, Fiji

**Fulton Adventist University College**  
Private Mail Bag, Nadi Airport, Fiji

**Kanana-Fou Theological Seminary**  
PO Box 456, Pago Pago  
American Samoa 96799

**Malua Theological College**  
Private Bag, Apia, Samoa

**Marshall Islands Theological College**  
PO Box 765, Majuro, Marshall Islands

**Methodist Davuilevu Theological College**  
PO Box 146, Nausori, Fiji Islands

**Methodist Deaconess Training Centre**  
PO Box 3757, Samabula, Suva, Fiji Islands

**Moamoa Theological College**  
PO Box 9226, Apia, Samoa

**Pacific Regional Seminary**  
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands

**Pacific Theological College**  
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands

**Piula Theological College**  
PO Box 2284, Apia, Samoa

**Seghe Theological Seminary**  
Seghe Postal Agency  
Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia,  
Western Province, Solomon Islands

**Sia'atoutai Theological College**  
PO Box 44, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

**South Pacific Nazarene Theological College**  
Naveiwakau, P.O. Valelevu  
Nasinu, Fiji Islands

**St. John the Baptist Theological College**  
PO Box 35, Suva, Fiji Islands

**St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox**  
Theological College  
c/- 11B Sevuka Place, Namadi Heights  
Suva, Fiji Islands

**Takamoa Theological College**  
PO Box 93, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

**Talua Ministry Training Centre**  
PO Box 242, South Santo, Vanuatu

**Tangintebu Theological College**  
PO Box 264, Bikenibeu, Tarawa  
Kiribati

**Tereretau Theological College**  
PO Box 667, Papeete 98713, French Polynesia

**United Theological College**  
16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta  
NSW 2151, Australia



## In This Issue

*Editorial: The 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College*  
*Upolu Lumā Vaai*

*Talanoa of Justice: Keynote Address on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the*  
*55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College*  
*Archbishop Emeritus Rt Rev. Dr Winston Halapua*

*The Dance of the Frigates: Reframing the Ecumenical History of the Pacific*  
*Theological College from the Perspective of the Pacific Household*  
*Aisake Casimira*

*Relational Theologising: Why Pacific Islanders Think*  
*and Theologise Differently*  
*Upolu Lumā Vaai*

*Veikau (Forest/Wild) Theological Pedagogy for*  
*Transformative Encounter in Fiji*  
*Taniela Balenaikorodawa*

*'Kill the Boys...let the girls live':*  
*Murder, Midian, and Mosaic Leadership in Numbers 31*  
*Kathryn Imray*

*Si'i le Tuā'oi: Shifting Perceptions on Exodus 1:8-2:10*  
*through a Samoan/Pasefika Reading*  
*Faafetai Aiava*

*Resistance, Resilience and Radical Justice:*  
*Reimagining Theological Research in the Pacific*  
*Gladson Jathanna*

*At Home in the Pacific Five Millennia and Counting: Decolonising Pacific*  
*Institutions of Higher Learning and Research Methodologies and the Role of*  
*Research Institutions like the Pacific Theological College*  
*Unaisi Nabobo-Baba*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*In Pursuit of a Pacific Island Biblical Hermeneutics - A Review of Elusions of*  
*Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women (2003) by Jione Havea*  
*Book Review by Fatilua Fatilua*

*Work in the Spirit Toward a Theology of Work (2001) by Miroslav Volf*  
*Book Review by Ioelu Onesemo*